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MRS. DAVID G. RITCHIE

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BY

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TWO SINNERS

CHAPTER I

Close by the railings of the Brighton Parade, at the unfashionable end near Sussex Square, Maud Monckton stood watching the sea and sky. All that February afternoon the sun had been slipping very slowly down an unclouded blue sky till at last it reached the blue sea-line. Then a strange thing happened!

It did—actually—seem to touch the horizon line, and the red globe suddenly bulged out on either side as if it was no real planet, but some monstrous ball of crimson blood hanging in our atmosphere, actually touching the waters of our Channel; an awful portent of some unexpected catastrophe.

Maud looked on amazed by the apparition. As instantaneously as thought flashes into being, something within this ominous ball, something, the heart of it—its nucleus—moved slowly through its flaming bulging skirts and disappeared into the void, leaving behind it on the horizon only the empty shallow crimson husk, the wreck of the spectator's own illusion.

Maud still gazed motionless, and in another

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moment this splendid husk shrank, collapsed into a narrow streak of fire, glittered, and was gone, gone—both Truth—and Illusion.

The spell was over, Maud moved her eyes at last slowly over the sky and sea. The whole sky glowed with what seemed to the girl's excited imagination a deep troubled resignation. The sea lay before her like a flat mucous expanse of restless thoughts giving expression to themselves in shimmering opalescence.

It was profoundly melancholy, that ending to a sunny winter day; though why it was melancholy she could not tell. She turned and looked across the road to the houses.

A light flashed into a room opposite, and looked out wistfully for a second, like a human eye. Then a blind came down like an eyelid and concealed it. Another light sprang into being at another window, and yet another, only to be extinguished by some unseen hand. The traffic in the road was dwindling, sounds were striking finely, sharply, on Maud's ears through the frosty air.

She turned back once more to the sea. The wonderful restless colour was fading out of it, its troubled movements were stilled; physical darkness was overcoming them, and wrapping them round with the oblivion of the night. Maud shivered! It was very cold! She crossed the road and stood for a moment at the house opposite, where she lodged with her two sisters. Then she turned and walked westwards, keeping her eyes on the twinkling lights that ran out

to the distant pier-head : thinking as she walked. Her face with its small, handsome and rather arrogant features, half hidden by her veil, were full of perplexity, dislike of her present life, doubt as to whether the step she was about to take was justifiable. That step was—marriage.

She had concealed in her muff a letter which, if posted, would settle her future decisively. The letter in her muff was addressed to : " Major Kames, Princes Hotel, Hove."

It was an answer to a letter from him, not so badly expressed—considering that he must have written many love-letters during the twenty years of his adolescence, and must have exhausted some of the usual forms of speech. He said that he loved her, as he had never expected to be able to love any human being. That, of course, was not an unusual preliminary. Then he said he knew that he had faults. That sentence Maud resented. Of course he had faults ! She was going to correct them for him ! No ; what he really meant was to apologise for not being young. That fault could never be corrected, alas !

He said that his wealth had acquired a new value in his eyes because it would enable him to give her a really good time. Now this expression a " really good time " jarred on her pride. It was clear to Maud that he considered that, although on the one side *he* had faults, yet on *her* side she was having far from a " good time " with her two sisters in seaside lodgings.

Major Kames was pluming himself on his power to give her what she could not get without him—him—with all his faults.

Now Maud longed for a "really good time," but she wanted it without the unnecessary obligation of being grateful to anybody for it—because that hurt the "pride" of which we have already spoken. So when she had sat down in her cold little bedroom looking over dismal backs, she had taken pen in hand and had written to Major Kames in lofty style, as if his wealth was on the whole a drawback to their marriage, and she accepted him in spite of it. Having written the letter, the only question was, should she post it? She had been walking on the parade for nearly three-quarters of an hour and was still racked with uncertainty as to whether she disliked her present life so keenly that to escape it she was willing to marry Major Kames.

So, his real faults were that he was forty, and that he was—not exactly—vulgar—but——! He was one of those men whose presence in a room can never be ignored. His ideas came to him spasmodically, and were pronounced in forcible language. People whose minds moved slowly considered him very clever and a little confusing; but he made them feel that "something was going on." The air stirred when he was there.

But if Kames had faults, he had also inexhaustible good humour, and a capacity for keeping in order the wealth he had inherited.

Are not these two qualities priceless in a husband?

So, what should Maud do? Maud looked little older than twenty-three, but she was really twenty-eight, perilously near twenty-nine. Time was flying.

Time had already flown away with her sister Ursula. Poor darling Ursula with her high-bridged nose and eyeglasses, her face worn into rather rigid lines, and her complexion dulled by her forty years of careful responsibility and her fight against poverty.

Time had only begun with Stella, their half-sister. Stella was twenty-one, and she had always attracted men. Marriage was certain for her. She had, indeed, nearly captured Major Kames; at least she had discovered him at a friend's house, she had shaken her turquoise earrings at him, had monopolised him, and then in an unlucky moment had tried the effect of singing to him in her high soprano, he playing her accompaniment. When that performance was over Major Kames had closed the piano—rather a rude thing to do—and from that moment Stella observed what she ought to have seen before, that the wealthy and somewhat flashy warrior was really interested in Maud.

It had taken Stella some few days to recover from the shock, and when she did recover she fled from the scene of her defeat to their aunt, Lady Dorothy Broughton. From Lady Dorothy's home in Brown Street she had written a letter to Ursula, hinting mysteriously that she

thought younger sisters, especially half-sisters, were sometimes in the way.

But the second letter she had written had contained no pessimistic remarks, it had been cheerful and affectionate. She had returned home that very afternoon in February of which we speak, and her blue eyes (that matched the earrings) looking enigmatic.

Maud having written, but not yet having posted, the letter to Major Kames, wondered—hoped—that Stella had forgiven her.

The letter was not yet posted. It lay in Maud's muff, and the more Maud thought about it the more difficult it was to decide whether it should be posted at all.

One thing only was absolutely clear to her. She hated Brighton, and every day it became more likely that Ursula would discover a house that would be cheap enough for them to take and settle in. Maud could picture the sort of house—in a side street, overlooking other small houses. There would certainly be euonymus bushes in front and behind, and a square of dank grass called by the house-agent—a garden. They would have one maid, of that non-humorous kind, who, being unable to do anything, undertakes to do everything.

Maud could picture Ursula, counting the pence, almost counting the coals. She would, if any one could, make the small income left to her unconditionally by their father, General Monckton, go as far as possible; her aim being always to let Maud and Stella have their own

pensions entirely for their clothes. Maud could imagine Ursula sitting by the dining-room table, working the sewing-machine vigorously, oblivious of the dreariness of their surroundings, happy in making clothes for Stella. Maud could imagine Stella, who, in spite of both sisters' help and constant gentle admonitions, was always shabby under her finery—she could imagine Stella talking about the distinguished musical career that she *ought* to find waiting for her, and meanwhile making the cramped house still more cramped by evolving, Heaven knows how, an inexplicable confusion out of order, wherever she moved. It was Stella's habit to sleep in her turquoise earrings; the only way to be sure of not losing them.

Maud could imagine that "home" of theirs. To settle down in such surroundings seemed like giving up youth, hope, romance. Maud had walked some little distance along the house side of the parade, and was opposite a pillar-box. She had only to put the letter to Major Kames into that box, and she would have Orpenden House in Surrey as her home—only—and there was the point—only with Major Kames as her husband.

What had Maud done that she should have found no man to love her but Major Kames? Should she brave the future, share Ursula's home and poverty, and try to make the best of it?

Maud fingered the letter in her muff. Why had she not written a letter of refusal and put

both in her muff, so that she could post one or the other? She had only written one letter—accepting Major Kames. That looked as if, down within the depths of her heart, she meant to accept him, and all these arguments were only meant to silence the conscience that clamoured for some justifiable course of action, and urged that the moral nature must be satisfied.

Maud drew out the letter. The envelope was beginning to get a little bent. No wonder! Would it be a great shock to Ursula if she married Major Kames? Had Ursula any suspicions that she meant to accept Major Kames? Ursula had behaved all through as if there could be no question of anything serious between her and Major Kames. Maud had always known, but she had refused to recognise the truth till this moment when it rushed peremptorily through her mind, that Ursula had taken for granted that Maud would never dream of marrying Major Kames! And yet in the first few days of their acquaintance with him, when Stella monopolised him and raved about him, Ursula had not disapproved—she had even allowed that he was wonderfully genial. But when Kames had shown his cards, and had openly paid attention to Maud, Ursula had observed a sudden reticence in her behaviour towards him. Was it because she thought him a worldling?

The hot blood rushed to Maud's head as she stood, letter in hand, by the pillar-box. Ursula had always expected more of her than of Stella—

more self-control, more refinement. Was that fair ?

General Monckton's second marriage had been with a charming, emotional, weak little woman who had died at Stella's birth. Ursula had brought the child up from its cradle, taking for granted, somehow, that she would not be a real Monckton in character, and must have allowances made for that fact. So Stella might marry a worldling and be excused, but Maud might not. Was that fair ?

Maud put the letter back in her muff. She must not stand still in the growing dusk, attracting attention to herself—she must walk on. She would walk a little and then come back again and post the letter.

Now, what exactly was wrong with Major Kames ? She would think it over carefully. His father had been a successful tradesman. Very well. Many of our peers are only too glad to marry into tradesmen's families. Kames had left the Army. Yes, but it was necessary, his property needed looking after ; there was nothing improper in that. Then he did most things well, business matters especially ; he was a good sportsman, expert at cards ; he was a bit of a real musician. All this was surely in his favour. Then he was good-natured to the very core. Yes—yes—but he was not "serious," and he had not one scrap of what is called "spiritual" in him. Maud, in imagination, as she walked along, could almost hear him, in his low, rapid voice, saying, "I know what you mean by

emotional, or what you mean by intellectual, but what the deuce do you mean by spiritual ? "

Major Kames called himself an " on the whole Agnostic," but Maud suspected that a practical and personal observation of human life had led him to believe that there was no Deity superintending the march of the universe. Yes, but Maud's father, General Monckton, had been actually anti-religious, while, on the other hand, Major Kames had no objection to going to church —on occasions. For instance, Maud was certain that he would want to be married by an Anglican priest, and that he would ridicule the idea of a purely secular ceremonial in a registry office, just as he would object to going into a vegetarian restaurant.

The lighted pier and the long line of lamp-posts were growing more and more sharp and starlike—though the night was not dark.

As she walked, a man passed her leading a black greyhound on a leash, and close behind, though loose, trotted a second greyhound exactly like the first. The pair wore little tan coats, both had their long thin faces meekly bent, their tails curled humbly under their slender bodies, and they moved with a curiously light elastic step as if scarcely needing to touch the pavement, all their amazing power of swiftness subdued to lowly obedience.

They were so gentle and so disciplined that Maud strained her eyes after them sympathetically. How much happier, how much simpler, life would be if, like the dog, one could find some

higher being visible to the sight and touch, whose will one could trust absolutely! As it was, God and immortality were uncertain; perhaps all our moral struggles might end in—nothing; perhaps those who enjoyed this life to the full were really the wisest?

As she walked, looking into the dusk as far as her sight would reach, she suddenly became aware of a figure coming towards her. It was impossible to mistake that walk. The walk was that of high and deliberate respectability. It was Ursula. She had just come out of St. Cuthbert's from one of Father Fitzherbert's Lenten addresses. The figure became more distinct. Now Maud could see that it was tall and angular. She could see the familiar black leather bag in which Ursula carried a book of devotions, her purse, and sundry keys. Ursula had never fallen under her father's influence; she was of a type peculiar to England, a type that forms the very backbone of the race, self-controlled in every act and thought, religious, austerely and unattractively dressed.

Should Maud turn and fly, and fling her letter into the pillar-box as she passed it? There was time, for Ursula was short-sighted.

No, to fly from Ursula would be a silly thing—a sort of cowardice. If Maud married Major Kames, well, she would marry him, and brave it out. She would post the letter at that pillar-box; she would slip it in before Ursula's very eyes, though she would not explain, say to whom it was addressed, just then—not just immediately.

"How delightful of you to come to meet me!" said Ursula, now face to face with her sister.

Maud turned without answering, for she felt a sudden lump in her throat. She passed her arm through her sister's.

"How light it is! the moon must have risen," said Ursula.

"I've been watching the sunset," said Maud, "while you've been listening to the exciting oratory of Father Fitzherbert."

"He talks very quietly," said Ursula. "I wish you could come with me next Friday."

"I would, dear, only I can't," said Maud; "I can't go and add one more to the crowd of women who listen to him and worship. I don't like these spiritual men, they get too much flattery from women." She spoke with a certain bitterness, because the thought of Major Kames lay behind the word "spiritual." "I'm quite sure that all of them—except you—would give anything to drag him down to the level of a sacerdotal flirtation."

"Poor things!" murmured Ursula. "Maud, do you know I went to look at a house before going into church!"

Maud's heart began to beat swiftly.

"Oh," she said, "did you?"

"A little house, next the corner one in Athelstane Place. It faces west, and it is three minutes from St. Cuthbert's."

"Oh," said Maud.

"And the rent—what do you think?"

"I really can't guess," said Maud.

"Thirty-five pounds," said Ursula, but her voice had changed—it was tentative, she saw that something was wrong.

"Ah, yes," said Maud — "thirty-five pounds!"

"A little garden behind," said Ursula slowly.

"Euonymus bushes in front?" said Maud desperately.

"No, behind," said Ursula.

"And what in front?"

"Nothing in front except an iron paling."

"Oh," said Maud.

There came a break in the line of the parade and a side street. A large motor-brougham was turning off the parade into the side street, so the sisters had to pause for a moment at the edge of the curb, while it passed them.

The moon had suddenly appeared above the roof of the houses, and its broad light flooded the parade and the sea. The tide was going down, and some low rocks were visible at the surface of the water. The two sisters looked across the road at the shimmering silver of the sea and these black shining patches, and, as they did so, they could see clearly a man's figure striding along by the parade railings. Maud shrank into herself. Ursula glanced away. Here was the very man who was troubling both their thoughts. It was Major Kames! His soft felt hat was tilted over his eyes. In spite of the training of his youth, he slouched a little.

He had seen them and raised his hat, and for

the flash of a moment they saw his strong, fleshy features and black hair. Maud thought she saw his brown, staring eyes. Something in his presence, though so far off, made her shiver. She felt Ursula's arm stiffen slightly. He walked on, and the two sisters crossed the road to the opposite pavement. Here stood the pillar-box. Maud had now decided that she would pass it without posting her letter.

"We could get the house at the quarter—that is, in six or seven weeks' time," said Ursula with a slight break in her voice. "It would be a good thing to settle as quickly as we can, because our lodgings are expensive, and I really need all the money I can save for our start. Even though we have enough furniture to more than fill the house, there are a hundred small expenses—carpets altering and so on."

"I've got a letter to post," interrupted Maud. "I mean——"

She almost stumbled against Ursula as she spoke.

"I don't know that it matters much," she said. "Let's see what is the next delivery? Six o'clock? It's past that already."

Ursula had stopped and was looking at her sister. Maud was fumbling with a letter at the box opening, as if she couldn't find it. She was rapidly making up her mind now, for the last time. If she accepted Major Kames she would soon find out whether he was endurable, and if he proved unendurable she could break off the engagement. It would be quite fair, for how on

earth is one to tell beforehand ? Now, that was her decision—it was final !

She slipped the letter in, and heard it drop to the bottom of the box.

It was done !

She went back to Ursula and took her arm again ; her cheeks burned like fire, and her feet moved feverishly. Ursula said no more about the little house at thirty-five pounds a year ! She was silent, till at last she said :

" You never met Aunt Dorothy's nephew by marriage, Dr. George Broughton, Maud ? "

Ursula's voice sounded as though she was forcing herself to speak.

" No," said Maud, " not that I remember."

" Stella met him at Aunt Dorothy's. He was at Cambridge ; he's now got some science post in London. He's here, at Brighton, just for one night, I believe, and Stella has asked him to come to see us this evening."

The two women walked on together in silence.

So this explained Stella's enigmatic look when she arrived ! Had she been travelling down with Dr. George Broughton ? Had Stella possibly consoled herself for the loss of Major Kames ? " Men, men, men, always men," sighed Maud. And what of Ursula, for whom no man cared ?

They walked into their lodgings, up the narrow stairs, and went into their sitting-room. The lights were not turned on. Stella was there in a low chair by the fire, smoking a cigarette. Although she found punctuality impossible, and

also unnecessary, she was already dressed for the evening, and yet it was not half-past six! Her black hair was very carefully arranged with elaborate combs, she was wearing her blue satin dress, her blue earrings of course, and she was stretching out a pair of very smart shoes to the blaze. Shadows flickered over Stella's face, dimming its clear freshness; the dimples in her cheeks deepened a little as she turned her head and looked at her step-sisters.

"You look as if you'd both been converted," she remarked, as she blew a puff of smoke into the air.

Maud took off her gloves and veil with deliberate care. She had now a part to play, and she must control her emotions.

"So we look like that, do we?" she replied. She glanced into the mirror over the mantelpiece. She saw there in the uncertain moving light and darkness her own face, the small, well-cut, proud features, clear, pale complexion, hair and eyes a light brown. She could see the unusual flush on her cheeks, and she put up both her hands to them.

"I haven't been to hear Father Fitzherbert," she said. As she spoke she turned and looked at Ursula, who had remained standing behind her, silent.

Was it only the firelight that gave her sister's face that grey look, and brought out all the lines in her face?

"Have you been listening to that man all this afternoon, poor dear?" asked Stella, looking

first at Ursula and then at her cigarette-end attentively.

Maud moved away to the door.

"No," said Ursula, "I was looking at a house—first."

"A house!" said Stella. "Yes, of course." She stared into the fire and began smoking again, and Maud opened the door and went out.

CHAPTER II

As soon as dinner was over, Maud slipped away and went to her room. The conversation had been mostly in Stella's hands. She had told her rather silent half-sisters the latest news about their Aunt Dorothy and her dog—the dog that had partially consoled her after the death of her husband, Mr. Broughton; the dog that everybody except Lady Dorothy thought an intolerable nuisance.

Maud had laughed a good deal, and now she was thankful that dinner was over. But there was still the evening to get through and George Broughton to meet, and it flashed across her mind that if Major Kames got her letter by the nine o'clock post there was nothing to prevent his coming at ten, and then—Maud's hands grew as cold as ice.

Almost unconsciously through her father's influence, Maud had very early in life dropped the old-fashioned optimism of orthodox Christianity, which pictures this life as a racecourse, and the future life as a goal where a prize awaits each human soul if it cares to strive for it. Almost without mental effort she had adopted the more fashionable optimism of the present day—the belief that we are running, not a race, but a helter-skelter, merely for the sake of

running, and because evolution has provided us with legs.

While she was still in the buoyancy of her youth she considered her sister Ursula's desire for personal immortality an unnecessary weakness. Maud thought it strange and more sensible for Humanity to want nothing better than to run from somewhere to nowhere in particular. Why shouldn't people enjoy climbing a ladder that has a sort of a kind of a bottom, but no top? It showed a proper sort of courage!

Any doubt as to the satisfactoriness of this form of exercise she called pessimism, for was not mere living a hazy sunshine of joyful possibilities? She called Ursula playfully, "The Pessimist." But as time went on this misty youthful happiness melted away, and left her face to face with a hard bare fact that she had not anticipated—her girlhood had gone for ever. What had that to do with "Life"?—why did that matter? It *did* matter, horribly. At every step of the past she had been attended by a kind of sympathetic interest that the world takes in a pretty unmarried girl. In a year or two, the world would pass her by with that peculiar sort of indifference that is meted out to the "superfluous woman."

Why should she mind that? Why should people mind being ignored? It doesn't prevent them from running from "somewhere to nowhere in particular."

When she had to tell Ursula of her engagement, could she say that she had accepted Major

Kames in order to escape from a haunting fear of dying husbandless and childless? In other words, that the optimism she had boasted of did not go very deep?

Could she confess this to any man or woman? Certainly not, and least of all could she confess it to Ursula, because it would wound her to the heart. Maud's thoughts flashed over the lives of the unmarried women she knew; almost all, except Ursula's, seemed to her obviously cramped by the repression of the great human emotions. Ursula believed that a Father in Heaven watched over her—*that* gave her courage.

Why could not Maud believe that? Maud paced up and down her room: all that she could believe was that Man has emerged painfully from an unknown past, and has found a sinister welcome awaiting him:

> "Time with a gift of tears!
> Grief with a glass that ran—"

Maud heard the front-door bell ring. Her heart stood still. It could not be Major Kames! Her letter could not have reached him yet, and he would not dare to call until he knew what that letter contained. She could hear a light step on the stairs and a voice, very different from Major Kames's, say to the maid: "Mr. Broughton." He must be tall and interesting-looking, with that voice.

She went to the mirror and looked at herself. Tears that had tried to come she had beaten back, her eyes were dry, her cheeks as flushed

as they had been before dinner. She felt nervous and excited. Before going into the sitting-room should she ring the bell and tell the maid not to admit Major Kames if he called? That would be a strange way of treating the man you have just promised to accept as your husband! She sat down at a little table and scribbled off a note:

"DEAR MAJOR KAMES,

"I have not told my sisters yet of our engagement. Will you come to-morrow and see me?

"Yours ever,

"MAUD MONCKTON."

Was "Yours ever" the proper thing to write? It certainly was not too cordial. "Yours affectionately" would sound silly and wasn't true. No doubt people in love were able to invent something suitable. "Yours ever" must stand. It wasn't actually a lie—she *was* "Yours ever" of a sort.

She folded up the note and addressed it. Then she rang the bell and gave the letter to the maid and told her to give it to Major Kames if he called. Now she was safe—till to-morrow.

Now she would go and see what this cousin of theirs was like. He was the nearest approach to a cousin she and her sisters had: would she when she saw him really feel envious of Stella? How young, how full of energy, how cultured that voice had sounded! She left her room.

She could hear his voice in their sitting-room, he was talking just as if he was describing something. The mere sound was extraordinarily pleasant—empty sound as it was. She turned the handle of the door and went in.

He was standing in front of the fire, between Stella and Ursula, who were seated on either side, Stella doing nothing, Ursula, as usual, working.

He was tall, and erect, and slim; his face when Maud entered was bent towards Stella.

He raised his head instantly and glanced across at the newcomer, with eyes that looked out from under level brows, eyes that were speculative, almost wistful. It was a face full of ability, though highly nervous, regular in features, dark, with thick brown hair growing low on a broad brow.

"I have the honour to be," he said, coming forward to shake hands with Maud, "your aunt Dorothy's husband's brother's second son."

He was smiling, but his eyes widened with an expression that meant surprise and approbation. Perhaps he had expected Maud to look like Ursula—taking for granted that Stella would have two plain step-sisters, like Cinderella in the fairy story.

"Yes, I know," said Maud. "It's very odd that we have never seen you before," and she turned away and looked about for a chair. There seemed to be no chairs in the room, and yet the room was full of chairs.

Broughton moved forward with a rapid, graceful movement, and seizing a chair pulled

it just opposite to the hearth-rug, so that now when he went back to his position against the mantelpiece he looked down on a little triangle of women.

Maud seated herself demurely. She stared for a moment at her own lap, then at as much of the fire as she could see on each side of Broughton's legs, and then finally up at his face, and this was what her eyes had intended all along, for it fascinated her.

He was again looking down at Stella, and Stella, leaning back in her low chair, with her turquoise earrings slanting into her hair, wore an air of gentle self-righteousness touched with sorrow for the world that had not understood her talent. Maud knew the expression well. It appeared whenever Stella was conscious of being admired.

Maud's eyes glanced over Stella's blue satin to her blue stockings and the shimmer of the smart shoes that covered up a neat darn, a darn made by Maud herself, for Stella frankly preferred holes. So Stella knew that she was being admired; what were her feelings to George Broughton in return?

"Go on talking," said Ursula, glancing up from her work at her new-found cousin.

"I'm afraid I've been shamelessly egotistical," said Broughton, glancing at Maud with an air of apology, "but I've been spoiled long ago by the interest Stella takes in science, and have been dosing her and Ursula with my new work at the laboratory before you came in."

Stella interested in science! Maud was amazed at the news. Nothing in the world bored Stella so much as anything to do with science, or religion, or what she called "stodge."

"Science is too thrilling," said Stella, and the dimples in her cheeks grew very deep.

"I'm sure it is," said Maud, with a slight smile; "it must be thrilling to feel that you and you only have got a key to the universe."

Broughton turned his eyes away from the direction of Stella's dimples and slowly looked Maud over. But he was not really thinking of her, his mental vision was of something in the distance, beyond her.

"It's not so easy now to think you've got a key to the universe. That's been thought too often," he said. "Mathematics were to solve everything, then physics, then physical chemistry, then thermo-dynamics. Whenever a fresh push is made in one department of science the pioneers are disposed to take themselves too seriously."

"It's human nature," said Maud, "to take oneself seriously if anybody can be induced to listen to one for half a minute."

"Aren't you rather hard on human nature?" said Broughton, smiling. "Anyhow, the more advanced any branch of science becomes, the more we expect it to solve the problem of life or of matter; and yet this problem grows not simpler, but more and more complex, so that, instead of being able to smooth things out and reduce everything to some universal principle, the very reverse is taking place—we are busy

making confusion worse confounded. The fact is that now that the light of science burns more brightly, we are becoming conscious for the first time of the increasing vastness of the dark that surrounds us, the mystery of the universe in which we find ourselves. The more we know the more we become aware that we really know nothing."

Maud looked up at him. This man had probably no more belief in immortality, or Christ, than had Major Kames, but his unbelief was tinged with reverence—that was in itself a sort of religion—perhaps—all the religion that any one has a right to have. And—George Broughton looked so young. Maud could not help picturing him and Major Kames standing together—Major Kames!

The silence was broken by an exclamation from Stella.

"How intensely exciting your work must be! I just wonder that you can spare the time to eat or sleep."

Broughton burst out laughing. He was delighted at the remark, though to Maud it seemed a very silly one.

Maud shrank into herself and was silent. If Stella had said "Bo," he evidently would have been equally pleased. He would doubtless have discovered some strange grace and intelligence lurking in that ejaculation that had escaped the world's consciousness all these many years.

How was it that Broughton could be

profoundly critical of ideas—and so uncritical about Stella ?

Maud gnawed mentally at this question over and over again. Was it because he had no measure with which to weigh a woman, but the measure with which he weighed himself ? Did he attribute to every human being who was kind to him the intelligence, the moral rectitude, of his own nature ?

Maud glanced up at his face and felt certain that it was so.

" A great deal of one's work is dull," he said, turning to Stella, " because it doesn't even involve thinking. So that six or seven hours' work daily in a laboratory doesn't mean six or seven hours of concentrated thought. Nothing of the sort—it may mean mere pottering for hours, days ; it may mean waiting for results, or perhaps patient attention only, observation and calculations of a mechanical kind.

" A great discovery may turn up by accident. A lucky ' by-product,' so to speak, may turn up in some experiment that in itself has no results. A man may work for life and do little for Science, or he may make a sudden step forward, though he has no constructive imagination. By patient attention he may hit on something that he neither expected nor was capable of anticipating."

" What is your particular work ? " asked Maud.

" Chemistry," he said.

Ursula sat on her side of the fire, knitting

away and listening intently, glancing up at Broughton through a pair of eyeglasses stuck on her high-bridged nose. Long experience of never being admired, of never expecting to be admired, of never feeling bitter because she wasn't admired, had given Ursula a certain quiet dignity of self-forgetfulness. Of the three women, she was the only one who listened to Broughton with pure unalloyed interest in his talk for its own sake.

Stella was full of the "pride of possession." She was saying over and over to herself—that though Maud had wrenched Major Kames from her grasp, she would find it impossible to capture Broughton. Stella had done her best, in fact, to make it impossible—she had hinted more than once to Broughton at Aunt Dorothy's that her sister Maud had already made her choice—a choice which was perhaps a little disappointing. Stella was strong now, in the conviction that one oughtn't to marry a man because he was wealthy—was Maud going to marry for wealth? Stella's thoughts, indeed, all the time that Broughton was talking were on this subject; and only now and again did she recover her attention sufficiently to be able to throw out vague and rather exaggerated pronouncements of sympathy.

She was arguing with herself that manly beauty and youth were "really and truly" of far greater importance in a lover than the possession of an ancient country house, of motor-cars, of wealth that laughs at the bills of milliners and of tailors. So indeed she argued.

She wanted to assure herself that she was not merely acting rightly, but was lucky—and Maud was likely to be " unlucky."

Stella felt that she had within her all the musical imagination that should command a brilliant career ; but that society being what it is, full of ignorant prejudice and full of corruption, a woman had a better chance—sad to say—if she had wealth at her back.

If you have money, you can pay for the publication of your book—and give the public a chance ; you can pay people, by giving them expensive food and drinks for nothing, to look on while you act, or while you sing ; you can " bribe " a reluctant world to your feet just as you " bribe " a naughty child to be good, for a moment. And in spite of all this—this gross fact about life—about marriage for a woman—Stella felt willing to " give up " Major Kames to Maud, and to take instead this penniless, brilliant young man. It would mean death to the career she desired, but it would mean love ! And after all love is—something ! So indeed she argued !

As to Maud, she listened, but all the time her whole mind was intent, watching Broughton with downcast eyes that nothing escaped—not a glance, not the intonation of a word. Why did Stella allow this man to love her ?—for it was plain to Maud that her sister was not in love with him, but was trying to think she was ! Probably Stella felt that she too must marry somebody ! So she meant to marry Broughton, only—and this was Maud's chief point—Stella

was preventing some other woman from loving him, deeply, passionately, for his own sake. Strangely enough this thought made Maud's pulses leap with indignation. So George Broughton was to be sacrificed!

What about Major Kames being sacrificed on the same altar?

Ah, there was all the world of difference. The two men could not be compared. To compare Major Kames with Broughton was like comparing a modern Paris restaurant, ornamented with rococo plaster mouldings, with a Greek temple of the age of Pericles. To sacrifice Broughton was a shocking outrage, to sacrifice Major Kames was—well—a pity for the person who was compelled to do it. Maud felt profound—profound pity for Major Kames's wife.

The clock had struck half-past ten and the long hand had slowly dragged itself to the figure eight, when the front-door bell was heard to ring sharply.

Major Kames! The note she had given to the maid would stop him from coming upstairs! No, it had not stopped him, for there he was, actually coming upstairs! How horrible! No, it was not Major Kames—it was a woman's steps—alone.

Maud had clutched hold of both arms of her chair; the flush had vanished from her face and left her absolutely pale. She felt as if some one standing behind her had gently but firmly pressed her head down to receive some dreaded weight. She heard the door open; the odour

of flowers came to her nostrils; the whole room was filled by the scent of flowers.

"For you, Miss," said the maid at her elbow, and she laid a massive bouquet of lilies of the valley and carnations upon her knees. The maid also held out a letter.

"For you, Miss," she repeated.

Maud raised her head and took the letter. She half rose from her chair, and the flowers dropped to the ground.

In a moment Broughton was gathering them up.

"They are magnificent! Do you find the scent a bit strong?" he asked quietly.

Ursula's knitting had dropped to her lap and she was sitting upright looking at Maud. Stella was leaning forward in her chair staring.

Neither of her sisters asked: "Who are the flowers from?" They both knew. How could he have got flowers at this hour when the shops are closed? Her letter only reached him at nine! That was only part of the sinister unreality of the moment. The whole incident was like a nightmare from which she was unable to rouse herself. Broughton was passing Maud, in order to place the flowers on a table, and as he did so he swiftly and adroitly touched her hand with his, and whispered:

"Don't tear up your letter!"

Maud looked down at her hands. She was tearing up the letter. The touch of his hand on hers had brought her to her senses. It was the touch of a man who sympathises, nothing

more. It was Stella whom this man loved. She, Maud, was loved by Major Kames.

Maud straightened herself, and drew a long breath, and gravely tore open the envelope and unfolded the sheet.

It contained one word—"Thanks"—in Major Kames's large handwriting.

Maud looked round the room. Broughton was putting the flowers into an empty bowl. Ursula was fumbling with her knitting and leaning over it. Stella's face was flushed and averted.

"They are from Major Kames," said Maud, and she walked to where Broughton was standing.

"I suppose I must have them put into water," she added. She gathered them up in her hands, and went to the door. Broughton opened it for her, and she passed through without looking at him again, bearing her burden.

CHAPTER III

When once in her room she closed the door softly.

Only a genius could have said "Thanks," and yet——

She threw the flowers upon her bed. Then with a guilty, restless movement, she filled a glass on the mantelpiece, and taking up the flowers again, put them in. Then she opened her door and stepped outside and listened, the flowers in her hand. She could hear voices louder and louder; the sitting-room door was opening; he was saying "Good night." She closed her door again, and turned the key and put down the flowers. She stood holding her breath and waiting; she had closed her door lest she should hear him saying anything to Stella outside. She closed her ears for some seconds—it seemed a long time—and when she opened them she heard him come along the passage, pass her door, and go downstairs; then came a moment's quiet, and the hall door was pulled open and shut again. He had gone. Why had she met George Broughton to-day? He had made her *hate* Major Kames.

Maud unlocked her door again and looked out. The sitting-room door was shut and no sounds came from it. She swiftly seized the vase of

flowers and put it on a little table outside the sitting-room door. Then she returned to her room and locked the door for the second time. She could not go and say "Good night" to her sisters. She hadn't the nerve. It would be bad enough to say "Good morning" at breakfast and meet their eyes, now that they knew, though it would have been infinitely worse to have had to tell them. At least, that was over.

She resolutely began to undress. In a few minutes she heard Stella come out of the sitting-room singing in a sprightly way. She suddenly changed her singing into a whistle as she ran upstairs to her room. Maud thought she heard Ursula follow, and then all was quiet.

Maud had not been in bed a quarter of an hour, when there came a slight knock on her door; it was just loud enough to be heard if one was awake. Maud lay motionless and made no response. She tried to imagine that the sound was an illusion. The knock was repeated a second time, and Maud, not able to call it an illusion any more, began to harden her heart against the sound. Why did Ursula want to disturb her now that the pulses in her head were throbbing like some remorseless machinery? Why did Ursula insist on coming to her room? —why should she intrude just now—just now?

Maud listened for the knock to come a third time, but it did not come; she could hear only a faint rustle as of some one going away, and then there came absolute silence.

For a few moments Maud went on justifying herself vehemently for not letting her sister in. Why should she have to endure any reproaches, by word or look, about this crisis in her life? If her engagement was a wrong one, it was she who would suffer, and no one else. Life had conspired against her; she was the victim of tragedy; whereas all that was worth having, all that made for real happiness, had been thrown at Stella's feet, for her to play with. And yet Ursula actually wanted to come to talk about it all! It was rather hard! Then, while she still justified herself and pitied herself, there came sweeping over her the remembrance of all that Ursula had been to her, all that she had done for her, the years of unselfish ministration; and yet this unique sister and friend had been shut out from all knowledge of an event that was to come and separate them for ever. This friend had been repulsed when she—humbly enough—knocked at the door.

Bitter tears came to Maud's eyes and she wept on her pillow. Her father had been nothing to her—emotionally. He had been a presence, a voice speaking authoritatively, as she thought, discussing affairs, books, religion, philosophy, science, with the airy scepticism of a dilettante, colouring her youthful views of the world of thought. It was Ursula who had shared all her childish joys and sorrows, and who had watched over her with a maternal love. And dear Ursula, poor Ursula, was she lying awake, grieved to the heart?

Maud pushed out her arm in the darkness and put on the light. She threw on her dressing-gown and put on her slippers. The air was very cold. Cautiously she unlocked her door and opened it. It was dark in the passage and stairs, and the faint perfume of those flowers met her on the warm air of the closed house.

She left her door open and by its light crept upstairs. One of the stairs creaked as she went up. At the top it was almost perfectly dark; she felt her way to Ursula's door. Ursula had the front room. It had not been her wish, but propriety had compelled the two younger sisters to thrust it upon her. Under Ursula's door was a faint streak of light. Maud paused. She did not knock, because Ursula had knocked on her door in vain; she turned round the handle noiselessly and opened the door and closed it behind her. Ursula was sitting up in bed. She was reading.

Maud could see that she had been crying, the eyes behind the eyeglasses were reddened, and the mouth was relaxed. She exclaimed in a whisper:

"Maud! Dear Maud!"

Maud came towards the bed.

"I ought to have told you," she said—"oh, Ursula, I ought to have told you. Forgive me, forgive me, dear. God bless you—I can't wait, but I must say Good night, darling Ursula."

Maud bent down swiftly and kissed her sister's brow and then fled—fled, closing the door behind her rapidly and securely, and

hurrying down the stairs, by the aid of the thin railing, back to her own bedroom. And with her went the memory of Ursula's face—pale, tear-stained, full of love in which there was no room for thought of self, no room for forgiveness, for no anger had tarnished that heart of gold. Ursula's face meant profound anxiety for her darling's happiness and—perhaps—a sense of great loneliness.

CHAPTER IV

THERE are no longer any hidden romantic spots in our Island. There is not a mountain glen among the northern hills that has not been skimmed through a thousand times; there is not a quaint dovecot of a church hidden in a Sussex dean that has not been glanced at every day of the week by the motorist and his women-folk, as they go in search of that more congenial object of art—the picturesque village inn.

Is all this laying bare of old secrets the reason, or at least one of the reasons, why our love of poetry is dying? Nothing is mysterious, nothing is left to the imagination. Everybody has seen everything, or at least everybody has hurried past everything; and even the poor have seen the world—in their picture palaces.

If rapid physical movement has helped to kill the old romance, it has also created a sort of romance of its own—or rather an illusion of its own.

The mentally, the physically inert can now delude themselves into the notion that, by arriving here and there swiftly, they are making time of real value; they seem to be actually doing something. In the case of Major Kames, however, who might have shown more mental energy if he had had less money, there was no

case of self-deception when he moved about from place to place.

Behind the desire that he used to have for more or less superfluous movement was the conviction that life was probably a vicious circle, and that the slower you went the more you pandered to the false assumption that the human race was on some important high road and ought to go carefully. Possessing a certain power of artistic creation, a natural love of all the arts, of music, and poetry, Major Kames, in this rush of life, had left them uncultivated. If he played the piano and sang, it was because it was extremely easy to do so, and he found it gave enhanced value to the social side of life.

He had gone down to Brighton in December for a week because the ground was too hard for hunting, and he had stayed there two months on and off, much to his own amazement. But he had at last discovered his own motive. He meant to marry Maud Monckton—and he seemed to be on the eve of accomplishing his wish.

An experience of something like twenty years had impressed him with the fact that in the marriage market a very great deal of money will buy almost anything—titles—birth—beauty—talent—it will even buy *more* money; but one thing it cannot secure—it cannot secure fastidious culture and moral refinement, not merely because this is not to be found in markets of any kind, but because, even if found elsewhere, it is not amenable to economic laws; it has laws of its own, reasons that the reason knows not of. All

the romance that can lurk in the heart of a man of thirty-nine, who, like Kames, has knocked about the world, was concentrated just now on one object. He wanted to marry, to settle down permanently, and to have as wife a woman of a different type from those he had met before, the type of which we have just spoken. It is not to be found nowadays in Society, which spells itself with a capital S, nor in the wealthy commercial circles with which they intermarry. This type of woman can be met with now and again in some quiet, unfashionable country-house, or some secluded suburban villa, where the master of the house is a scholar of leisure, neither wealthy nor poor, an aristocrat of the world of letters, educating those around him to appreciate what is rare and to reject what is vulgar.

Another point of importance with Kames was that his wife should not hunt; he was convinced that women were spoiling the hunting-field—they were either slackers or they pressed.

But Major Kames's choice of a wife was to depend on more than character and education. He had painted a portrait of her in his imagination. She must be as tall as possible, and rather thin. She must look over the heads of other women with an expression of unconscious superiority. She must be neither black nor yellow (his reasons were obvious), but she must have ropes of light brown hair and a fair, pale, healthy complexion, and she must not smile too often. In short, her personality, physical and mental,

must be such as cannot be imitated by the actress or the foreigner.

Married life, he considered, had extraordinary natural drawbacks to it, but with a woman of whose presence he would constantly be proud, and whom he could trust, it might be endurable; it would at least be mysteriously charming and amazingly absurd—and he was no longer young.

Maud was as nearly a counterpart of that portrait as Kames was ever likely to meet. He pursued her with persistency and even with a certain amount of success. He found the chase interesting, for she was an unknown quantity to him—her mind was not constructed like his.

When Maud came down to breakfast on the morning following her engagement to Major Kames, her eyes caught in an instant three things—Ursula at the breakfast-table, a letter from Major Kames lying conspicuously on the table, Major Kames's flowers conspicuously in the middle of the table.

She had awakened that morning with a feeling of nervous fatigue, a sense of heaviness, which made it easier than she had expected to behave with a sort of weary diplomacy before her sisters when she met them that morning.

Now that her engagement to Major Kames was a fact, and known to be a fact, she must go through with it in a dignified manner. It was not necessary to pretend that she was in love with him—that would be an absurd lie; and she must not allow any one—not even Ursula—to

say, even to hint, that "being in love" is necessary to the success of an engagement.

If she broke off the engagement herself, she would do it properly—with decorum—on the plea, not that it was a mistake from the beginning, but that it had turned out to be a mistake.

Maud bent down as she passed her sister's chair and kissed her, saying tenderly "Darling Ursula," but she did not look to see if the emotion of last night was still reddening her sister's eyelids. She looked resolutely at her plate, and took up Major Kames's letter boldly and tore it open, as if she was accustomed to receive letters from him.

If only Stella had been down in time for breakfast, the situation would have been less strained, but Stella never was in time for anything.

Maud read through her letter twice, while Ursula wrestled with the coffee-pot and the hot milk.

"Major Kames," said Maud in a rather hard voice, "wants to come here this morning to see you. He wants to take me out somewhere to lunch. Is that all right, Ursula?"

Maud had tightened up all her nerves, and turned her face to her sister and smiled. When she saw that Ursula was holding out to her a cup of coffee with a hand that had a tremor in it, then, for a moment, she wanted to burst out crying; but she steeled herself resolutely and frowned, dropping her eyes and raising her

eyebrows in a manner common to her when she was determined upon some action.

"You will want to go out with him," said Ursula. The remark was neither a question nor a positive statement—it lay between the two; it came from a heart that was full of distress, full of surprise, and yet carefully trying to repress both.

"He will be here about eleven o'clock," said Maud evasively. Then she looked out of the window at the sea. It was a brilliant morning—almost as brilliant as the previous day had been. The sea was full of moving blue and white, which seemed to glitter backwards and forwards just as if some rich silk shot with blue and white was shifted to and fro to catch the light, first one way, then the other.

"I want to go out directly," said Maud. "I feel as if I needed some exercise. I have a slight headache, and motoring is no good for that. Can I do anything for you, Ursula?" and then, answering Ursula's anxious eyes, she added, "It's nothing, only I must get out of doors. Can't I do your shopping for you?"

Maud felt that she was successfully enveloping herself with an impenetrable cover, behind which she could endure her own troubles in secret, and all this without behaving to Ursula in any improper manner or ceasing to be affectionate to her. If she could go out alone, till Major Kames came, and got over his first meeting with Ursula and Stella as their future brother-in-law, then—well, then—then would come an interminable number of *tête-à-têtes* with Major Kames. Suppose

she found them unpleasant—perhaps humiliating! She ate her breakfast without being aware of what she was eating, and as soon as she excusably could, she got up.

Her sister's silence was both painful and yet a relief. It was impossible to talk of other things, just now, and yet any talk about the engagement was equally impossible. Just as Maud rose from her chair, Stella came into the room. Last night she had looked like a goddess; this morning, for the privacy of her own family, she was a very good-looking, untidy girl; her blouse was crookedly pinned at the back, she had forgotten to put on her waistbelt; on the other hand, she had two pocket-handkerchiefs with her and a book that she had no intention of reading.

"You rushed off to bed last night so that we couldn't congratulate you, old girl," she called out to Maud as she came in. "All the time I was with Aunt Dorothy I expected the news—but it didn't come." Stella spoke with a smile that made her dimples deepen.

"I was only engaged yesterday," said Maud, walking to the door as quickly as she could with dignity. "I could not tell you of it before because it had not occurred. Major Kames is coming here at eleven to see Ursula and you—and—me! I don't know anything about engagements, but I suppose they have to be announced."

The swift colour deepened in Stella's face, but she still smiled.

"I'm most awfully sorry I shan't see him this morning," she said, sitting down at the

table, "but I've promised to golf this morning at ten o'clock. I suppose I'm late; I must buck up. Please give him all the proper sort of messages and all that—and——"

"I will," said Maud, and she closed the door, shutting out Stella's flushed cheeks and Ursula's back, only too expressive—slightly bowed—patient—unhappy.

Maud did know very little about engagements, but she was sure that usually they were occasions of great rejoicing and much family discussion. How different was hers! She might almost have committed a crime and announced it! She walked dismally up to her room. Wasn't it rather hard that she should begin her new life as a culprit? What had she done to deserve such treatment?

She went out on to the Parade, towards Rottingdean, hurrying and trying not to think; breathing the keen cold air into her lungs, and looking with wide-open eyes at the blue sky and the sea as if the purity and brilliance of the morning could restore her peace of mind.

At eleven o'clock punctually, Ursula was in their sitting-room waiting. Maud had only just returned from her walk, and had run upstairs to her room. There was already the sound of a motor snorting at the door. Major Kames had come. Ursula was walking about nervously.

"That's right, Maud," she said, as her sister walked in. "I was afraid you——" There she stopped, for the girl's face was terribly pale.

Ursula seized her sister's hands. "Maud!"

The question "Do you love him?" she dared not add—Maud's eyes forbade it.

"It's all right, dear, all right!" said Maud rather proudly, but not without some tenderness in her voice, as she took her hands away from Ursula's grasp, and after kissing her affectionately, walked away with a high independent air. Kames's step was on the stairs—a very different step from the youthful spring of George Broughton.

Kames had not waited for the maid to announce him. He knocked at the door, opened it, and walked in.

He was a little flushed over and above his tanned complexion. He bowed to Ursula and then walked straight up to Maud, took her hand, and, bending down, kissed it. When he raised his head he stared at her and the flush died away. So his engagement was of importance to him, an emotional crisis in his life! He was putting his life into the hands of this tall pale girl, who looked at him with veiled criticism and yet did not realise how much it all meant—to him. She was thinking of herself only.

"Miss Monckton, Ursula, please congratulate us," he said, turning to Ursula, and he grasped her hands, holding them tightly in his own till she responded.

"You are much to be congratulated," said Ursula, stammering a little.

He released her hands, and the ceremony was over. He did not seem to have noticed Stella's absence—at least he made no comment.

The ceremony was over, and Kames had behaved in a very proper manner; he had not been objectionably hearty, nor hilarious, and the conversation that followed, though jerky and rather lame on their side, was made up for by volubility on his.

"There are any amount of things to talk over," he was soon saying. "And I want to take you all over to see Orpenden House. I am impatient for you to see—your future home—Ursula, you must see it—but this morning I want to take Maud off with me. I want to flaunt her before the world as belonging to me."

Maud and Ursula looked, not at each other, but at the top button of Major Kames's waistcoat.

"Eh?" he insisted.

"Of course," said Ursula; "I'm sure Maud will go; it's not windy."

"It's not at all windy," said Maud. "Have you got the putty-coloured motor or the green and purple?" She was trying to speak chaffingly, and she waited for his answer with a smile upon her lips.

"Green and purple," he replied. "Why?"

"On this lovely morning," said Maud, "a closed motor is simply impossible. You can send the man back for the other, can't you?"

Kames's face showed some disappointment. "I can, of course, if you wish it."

"Please," said Maud. "I can put on warm things, and you can send for another coat."

So determined was she that she had moved to the bell and had put out her hand to ring it.

"Don't ring," said Kames; "I'll go and tell the man myself if you really make a point of going in the other one." He looked at her; she bent her head emphatically.

"Really," she said.

He was not pleased, but he submitted and went downstairs.

Rather than meet Ursula's eyes, Maud walked to the window and looked out, making believe to be very busy watching Major Kames speak to the chauffeur and seeing the car slide swiftly off.

"I've begun early—eh, Ursula," said Kames, returning rather breathless. "Please make a note of this: Maud's had her own way from the very start. Don't you think I promise to make a good husband—eh?"

Maud turned away from the window.

"Do you want me to get ready? Perhaps I had better. What a glorious day it is!"

"But it gets icily cold in the afternoon. Maud, you haven't settled with Major Kames when you are to come back. Don't let it be very late in the afternoon, in an open car."

"Major Kames!" Kames stood erect at the door with a look of mock wrath on his face. "Major Kames! Maud, don't go till this insult is apologised for."

"Lionel," said Ursula, laughing a little. "It's difficult to make a sudden change in the way of addressing people! Lionel!"

"I don't find it difficult," said Kames, opening the door. "Maud comes easily—Maud, Maud, Maud! There's positively nothing to

learn in it, and Ursula follows as a matter of course—both fine names—as names go."

Maud fled upstairs to her room, feeling as she mounted each step that she was moving swiftly in a dream, a strange dream, out of which Major Kames might suddenly step, and leave her to go on dreaming of something else. Instead of dressing at once, she moved about her room in a blind way, holding her hands before her eyes. Must she dress? Had she to pretend that this dream was real, and to follow it out in the details that presented themselves to her?

She pulled a bonnet out of a drawer and put it on. It was of dark brown silk, with a frill; a pink rose was on one side. It suited her admirably; the pink rose was illuminating.

Maud looked at her own image in the glass, and drew a long and profound sigh.

She tied a brown veil over her face, and this only added to the illusive charm of her appearance.

"How hopeless!" she found herself saying aloud.

She went to a cupboard and pulled out a thick coat with a fur collar, a coat that Ursula had given her at Christmas, and for which she had saved previously.

Then Maud looked for a pair of thick gloves.

She found them in a moment, in a certain corner of another drawer. Her room was a pattern of neatness—of more than mere neatness; for in spite of the obvious poverty of the owner, there was a profusion of books—books

that must have cost money—carefully selected and carefully kept.

Whatever Maud did, she did well. She and Ursula had more than the usual woman's share of mental vitality, and it overflowed into the routine of every day, making them do little things in a grand manner.

She left her room very slowly, and went downstairs one step at a time, as if she was walking to meet some fate that she dreaded.

She glanced at the sitting-room door. She could hear Ursula's voice and then Kames's—deep in conversation. She opened the door and saw an amazing sight.

Ursula was on the couch with Major Kames beside her. Ursula's thin angular figure was bolt upright—all bony structure, so to speak, and considering its stiffness and power of resistance, wonderfully amenable to the persuasive arm that Kames had put round her, while he emphasised his words with his other hand and extended emphatic forefinger, wagging it under her very nose. Ursula's face was a little flushed, but it was smiling.

No man but Kames would have dared, would have cared, to treat Ursula in this fashion. She had expected to be treated with the respectful indifference, or with that secret enmity veneered by exasperating politeness that is meted out to the unavoidable chaperon; but Kames was arguing with her as if she was—well, a human being like himself—and for whom he cared.

"Ursula and I are agreeing on every point,"

called out Kames in a hearty voice. In some things, Kames was an expert! Ursula was already on his side; Maud could see that by the tone in which she was now pronouncing his name—"Lionel"—and the way she looked at him; there was already between them a cordial understanding, a mutual regard.

CHAPTER V

EVERYTHING that met Maud's eye that morning seemed vaguely disappointing, strangely faulty. The joy that was in the frosty air and fine vaporous sunshine, the gaiety of sparkling icy particles on hedgerows, on the roadside, were gone. The earth had clothed herself with a mantle of pure matter-of-fact. Every lane, every thatched cottage, suggested money or the want of it—contemptible money, money which the soul despises, and the mind searches for passionately.

Maud was, now, wealthy—at least wealth was hers if she put out her hands to grasp it—yes, if she had the courage to grasp it.

To Kames's remarks she replied with the proper amount of yes and no and smiles and laughter that she considered necessary to the occasion.

A great artist in words, a scientist, whom some believe to be a great philosopher, has called laughter an expression of human vanity. In his consideration of laughter he omits one kind—one peculiar to civilisation—a hard shrill noise, which is more or less competitive, like the crowing of cocks, and which is called, nevertheless, laughter by those who make it. It is meant to signify successful gaiety, and the sound

strikes the passer-by with a dismal world-weariness.

He also omits the laughter of tragedy—when some overpowering fear, fear of the death of a beloved one, is suddenly relieved by the presence of the beloved, and laughter, like a bird escaped, trembles and floats in an access of joy.

But Maud's laughter was not laughter at all, it was consciously due to an effort of will, in order to avoid the more difficult effort—talk with some one whom one does not understand and who is sitting too near. How long the drive seemed! They went some forty miles only, just straight inland and then along the northern edge of the Downs and finally to the sea again, reaching Eastbourne about one o'clock. The sea was now no longer perfectly smooth, the brilliancy of blue and white had faded. There was less blue and more white; a grey hue was stealing into it. The air was less frosty; there was the coming of wind and of thaw already in the air.

The car drew up at a large white hotel facing the sea.

"We can get our lunch here," said Kames. He stamped his feet on the pavement and then helped Maud to alight.

"Not a bad place this for lunch," he remarked, as he led the way through a pretentious portal. Maud saw no particular quality in the hotel: it was the sort of place that rich business people would motor down to from London, in order to feed. The dining-room was large, full

of small tables, though very few had occupants. Kames ordered a lunch *à la carte*, which irritated Maud.

"I have no particular preference for anything," she said hurriedly; "please don't order any weird sort of things for me, because I never take anything but coffee and bread and butter in the middle of the day."

This was not strictly true; but Maud's mood exaggerated the brilliant austerity of her own taste in order to throw his into deeper shadow.

There was nothing in his way of life that she admired, and yet she intended sharing it with him, retaining, however, the right to grumble at it. This seemed to be the bald fact.

"Rubbish!" said Kames, giving his orders.

She took off her veil and gloves and seated herself at the table, and sat looking as if nothing was really good enough for her. This expression was exactly what Kames admired. He had seated himself opposite her, and now he threw himself back in his chair and laughed.

"By Jove!" he said, staring at her, "you look as if you meant business."

Maud raised her eyebrows.

"What do you mean? Do you mean that I look hungry or greedy?"

"I mean that you look—splendid," said Kames; "you put a hoity-toity little bonnet on like that, and then you go and tell me that you don't know what I mean. Well, I mean anything you like, whatever you approve of, or will make you smile."

"Thanks," said Maud, with a faint smile.

"Without any flattery, Maud," said Kames, leaning forwards and putting his arms on the table; "sitting like that, so that one can't see your skirts, you look the very picture of a pretty, smart, clever Early Victorian, and nothing can beat that, nothing, by—all the gods of Egypt!"

"Why of Egypt?" questioned Maud.

"Why!" said Kames, trying to think. "Well, because, bless 'em, there's such a lot of 'em, and they're such rum-looking chaps."

"Thanks," said Maud.

"Eh?" he demanded. "Oh, I see; I've put my foot into it—ought to have sworn by a glass chandelier or a steel fender and fire-irons. But it's the way you move that I admire most—I've been longing to tell you that for two months," he continued, speaking now in a loud whisper. "You're different from any girl I've ever seen, this style exclusive. You're an enigma, a riddle."

"Of the Sphinx, I suppose?" said Maud, trying to look cheerfully across at him.

"No!" burst out Kames. He uttered the exclamation in a tone of suppressed thunder, that made the few scattered people in the room turn and glance at the pair. "*That* I suspected long ago."

"And what is it?" demanded Maud, with a temporary flash of real interest.

"What is it?" he said. "Well, I've come at it by years of meditation, up and down Europe

and the other side of the Atlantic. It's not an original idea, but it's true, I'm afraid."

"And what is it?"

Kames repeated the words in a slow, soft voice:

"And the end is—silence."

Maud's eyes fell. She shrugged her shoulders.

"That's why we kick up such a devil of a noise while we can," said Kames, taking up the wine list and looking down a page; "you'll take some champagne—they keep quite decent stuff here?"

"No, thanks," said Maud.

What would be the use of discussing with him a serious subject like "The End"? Although she had talked about "The End" in much the same manner herself, now that she heard it pronounced in a cocksure manner by Major Kames she found it crude and a little absurd. That Evolution should have toiled a million years in order to bring to the birth—Major Kames, just as he was, sitting there opposite to her, seemed to Maud an insufficient motive: there ought to be something more at the back of it; why, even Major Kames, not puffed out like the flame of the candle, but improved—into a saintly spirit—would be less foolish.

Was he content with his theory that he was going to be puffed out? Apparently he was; but then he probably thought that some considerable time would elapse before that event; he did not realise the force of the saying: "Majus et minus non variant speciem." But

Maud's thoughts were suddenly disturbed from this argument, for a waiter was bringing dishes to them. "I hope," she said, "that you don't want me to eat a huge lunch?"

"Champagne," said Kames, as if he had not heard.

"I said no champagne, thanks," Maud repeated. "I never drink wine at home."

"Pommery sec," said Kames.

"I can't imagine anything more absurd," said Maud, "than allowing oneself to be 'treated' to champagne."

"See page three hundred and three," said Kames, "in completed works of Cock-a-lorum—with an introduction by the Bishop of London! Waiter, bring some Apollinaris for this lady, and give me a whisky and soda."

Maud heaved a fluttering sigh, and began to eat the *hors d'œuvre* in front of her.

If only the man sitting opposite to her was not Major Kames, who was content that Evolution should have produced him just as he was—ripe for being puffed out! If only he was—some one else, some one who had a belief, even though it was an erroneous belief, in our spiritual nature, or at least a hope that some "purpose" lies behind this universe of sight and touch and some future beyond it! With a sudden and strange pang at her heart, she remembered Broughton's face, the way he looked, under his straight brows, as if searching for something. And he loved Stella! Stella of all people! Imagine Stella "helping" any man; imagine

her looking after him! Would she even *feed* him properly when he came in tired from his work? Stella—Stella, who was never aware of what anybody round her was feeling or wanting, who never saw if one was tired, or ill, or dull, or unhappy! What was Stella thinking of all the time? Was she picturing herself singing before a huge audience, hearing the slow rolling thunder of applause, seeing the raised faces and receiving a cheque for two or three hundred pounds and compliments from the Manager?

Maud felt more than ever unhappy and irritable.

Kames had been watching her all the time that he was busy eating.

"That's right," he said; "put your teeth firmly into that olive, it'll give you no end of moral strength."

Maud half laughed—but she also frowned. Now that he was her accepted lover, his remarks had become very personal—that was not good taste on his part—but perhaps she ought to have anticipated it.

A waiter at the far end of the room drew a cork with great expertness, making it ring with a deep, mellow, vibrating note, as if the very soul of wine had suddenly spoken a word.

"That's a jolly good sound," said Kames, turning his glass round and then lifting it to his lips.

"I thought you were musical," said Maud. The words were out of her lips before she could repress them.

"It isn't a pure note, of course, but it's a good one," said Kames.

"It was rather splendid," said Maud, beginning to be alarmed at her new-found capacity for rudeness.

"Yes, I am musical, in a way," said Kames; "I don't pretend to deny it."

"I should never have guessed you were," said Maud blandly, "if I hadn't heard you play. You don't look like a musician—you are too well dressed."

She was thankful to be able to say something complimentary which was true.

"No lover of art ought to be anything but well dressed," said Kames. "The Greeks knew that—they knew better than to represent Apollo with his hair matted and his boots laced up crooked. When that great god of all the arts started for Parnassus, lyre in hand, just to show 'em how to do it, he wore a special robe, flowing from neck to heels, and his hair tied up in a knot, for all the world like a sublime female."

Here Kames came to a sudden stop.

"Well, go on about Apollo," said Maud. "You're becoming interesting."

"I've finished," said Kames; "I don't get inspired for long at a time."

He certainly did not. The rest of the meal was mostly taken up with remarks of a purely personal nature which she tried to parry. Did he know that he was boring her? She rather suspected that he did know it, but that he meant

to take the reins into his own hand, that it was a conflict of wills, and that he was testing his own strength—in view of the future.

After lunch Kames insisted on going to the lounge, and chose a secluded corner, where they had coffee and he smoked. He chaffed her a good deal about not smoking herself, and then owned that he was glad that she didn't smoke and that she didn't sing.

This implied a distinct criticism of Stella—and Maud objected to it. She began to defend smoking and singing, and argued that both were as suitable for women as for men.

"Women don't know how to sing, and never will," said Kames dogmatically. "Their singing means nothing—no more than the birds. But the odd thing is that they can act—why, Heaven only knows."

Maud did not agree—she longed to leave him and all his ideas and his heavy lunches and everything. Except—alas, alas!—his wealth—and this was the first day of their engagement!

Fancy years and years of it! Wouldn't it be far better, far happier, to be poor?

Kames waited till he had seen the two or three men who were smoking leave the lounge and go out of doors.

Then he suddenly took hold of Maud's hands and drew her irresistibly to him on the seat.

"You forget that you're smoking," said Maud, with a haughty exasperation.

He released one of her hands and threw his cigar down.

"You'll have to take me just as I am, smoke and all," he said.

"You're too self-indulgent," she murmured, feebly resisting.

"I'm strong—so I am strongly self-indulgent. I'm strong, and I'm not at all merciful."

Then putting his arms round her, he drew her close, whispering,

"Now scold, scold, scold—if you can."

CHAPTER VI

When Major Kames left the Moncktons' lodgings late that afternoon, he was in his most buoyant mood, for Maud had, after all, been less difficult than he had anticipated. He had trusted in the last resort—to a certain force in his personality—and it had proved successful. Besides, it was arranged that he was to take her and Ursula and Stella—if she would go—to see Orpenden to-morrow. That looked like business. They were to stay the night at Orpenden—and they were to return the next morning to Brighton, while he went to town to choose a ring for Maud. Things were going briskly. The air of the Moncktons' sitting-room seemed to go on vibrating with Kames's presence after he had left. Some men—and women—seem to belong to the physical world in that vital conciliation; those who find them congenial breathe in strength from their atmosphere—those who are out of sympathy are exhausted by it.

Maud was exhausted. Ursula found strength.

"You haven't thought of writing to tell Aunt Dorothy yet?" asked Ursula, after a long silence that followed Kames's exit.

"No," said Maud, looking up with a startled air.

"She will be offended, Maud, if she sees it first in the papers."

Would Lionel have already sent the announcement to the papers? Maud had never thought of that possibility. It made the engagement seem terribly real!

"I think I should write to her at once," said Ursula. "You see she is positively our only near relative—all we have."

"I will write," said Maud, and she sat still, with her hands idle on her lap, looking at nothing.

"What was it, Ursula?" she said suddenly, "that you and Lionel were discussing on the sofa, before we went out this morning?"

"The future," said Ursula.

"Oh!" said Maud, and her heart gave a curious jump. She rose and took a fan from the mantelpiece and spread it out before her face. "What about the future?" she asked.

"About my coming to you a great deal—at Orpenden—after your marriage," said Ursula. "He is full of generosity."

"Of course," said Maud quickly; "anything else would be absurd."

"Men are not always as kind to a prospective sister-in-law," said Ursula. Ursula sighed, and then broke the sigh off in the middle. It was too late. Maud heard it.

"Lionel is kind—of course," said Maud. What about that little house with the palings in front and the euonymus bushes behind? Was Ursula thinking of that still? She would have to live alone in it—a life of solitude, broken by visits to Orpenden. That is—if the

engagement was not broken off. For a moment Maud had wondered whether Aunt Dorothy might ask Ursula to live with her; but that gleam of hope hardly lasted as long as the question took to frame itself in Maud's mind. Aunt Dorothy had always avoided having Ursula to stay with her. She had been even ingenious in inventing reasons why Ursula could not come, or, if she came, why she couldn't stay. Aunt Dorothy had slipped out of the stream of social life since her husband's death, partly because she had no art of entertaining and partly because she had no money to spend on entertaining—partly because nobody could stand her dog, and she and her dog were inseparable. When Maud or Stella visited her, people came—at least a few people; when Ursula visited Brown Street, people didn't come. This fact had impressed itself upon Aunt Dorothy's not very intelligent mind. So there was little probability of a permanent invitation for Ursula.

Maud could glance at Ursula askance from her fan. Ursula was sitting in her usual manner, very upright, her face composed, her iron-grey hair arranged with almost elaborate care. She had spoken all that afternoon calmly and cheerfully, without betraying one sign of self-consciousness. The distress that had been in her eyes last night, and the quiet sadness of this morning, had gone. That one sigh had been checked peremptorily.

Maud was sure that she knew what had wrought this peace in Ursula's mind. Her

sister had been praying and had found strength to put aside thoughts and fears about herself, and she had put Maud and Maud's affairs, as the expression goes—into the hands of God!

The artless pathos of it wrung Maud's heart. What were all the consolations of the world, the flesh and the devil, compared with this vision of a Divine Father, to Whom all His children are of supreme consequence? If only she could have that vision!

Maud got up hurriedly from her chair, and seizing a footstool, placed it at Ursula's feet. Then she sat down upon it like a child and laid her cheek on those faithful knees. Ursula did not speak, but she laid a caressing hand on the thick brown hair, and the two sisters kept a great silence, while the clock on the mantelpiece ticked fretfully. The silence was only broken by the sound of Stella opening the door and slamming it behind her. They could hear her run upstairs. She came into the room gustily.

"Hullo, old girl!" she called out with a tone of breezy surprise, as if she had been at home all day and Maud had suddenly returned. "So you're back at last!"

"It's you who are back," said Maud, raising her head.

"I was in to lunch," said Stella airily. "Had a good day?" she questioned as she laid her golf clubs on the table.

"Very!" said Maud.

"Did you tell him how vexed I was not to have seen him?"

"I said everything I ought to have said," replied Maud. "At least, I believe I forgot—but of course he understood."

Stella was wearing a dark-blue golf coat and skirt and a blue cap. She looked so handsome and so full of material prosperity that Maud secretly wondered why Lionel had not instinctively preferred her. Stella's want of method would not have mattered to a very wealthy man—it would matter to a poor man! Stella would never alter. The artistic temperament, whether it goes with ability or without ability, is essentially a solemn temperament—it takes itself seriously. Its own proportions seem gigantic to itself.

"Can you come to Orpenden with us to-morrow?" asked Ursula gently. "We shall stay the night there—and come back early the next day."

Maud looked hard at the carpet. How splendid Ursula was—how loyal, how protecting!

Stella's blue eyes looked hard and brilliant. She laughed. "You're not losing any time; yes, I'll come with you—if there's room. When you're married, Maud, you'll have to give dances on my account. I shall expect a lot from you—when you're wealthy. Keep your mind easy on that score," and she walked towards the door, leaving her clubs on the table.

"Your clubs, Stella," said Ursula.

Stella came back and took them up. "I was only joking, Maud, of course. The only

thing I care for in the world is to be personally distinguished—by my own brains—or "—and here she looked down at Maud with an odd expression—" to help some one else to become distinguished."

Stella felt the righteousness of her attitude very keenly as she went out of the room, clattering her golf clubs. It would do Maud good to be reminded that, though she was marrying a wealthy person, she was not marrying a distinguished person. George Broughton had more distinction in his little finger than Major Kames had in his whole person; besides—George was a gentleman.

Stella was not sure whether she had made a mistake in promising to go to Orpenden. She was full of a keen curiosity to see Orpenden—Orpenden, that she might have had herself, if she had made the least effort! Her own future home would be very different; and here Stella's thought sped ahead into the future. She became speculative. How far would it be possible to utilise Aunt Dorothy and Aunt Dorothy's house? She imagined herself living in a very charming though small flat in town, but giving her parties at Brown Street.

"Lady Dorothy Broughton and Mrs. George Broughton At Home."

She would do all the arranging and all the inviting, most ably and economically—and Aunt Dorothy would pay. Luncheons cost very little if you only bring brains to the aid of them. If you have something very distinctive—the sort

of thing the artistic woman hits upon by instinct—that answers far better than mere vulgar excess of things that any shop could provide you with.

Stella looked round her own bedroom. The toilet-table was heaped with a tangled mess of articles and dirty hair-brushes. On the mantelpiece were dismal bottles, some nearly empty, some half full. The necks of one or two were coated with a sort of fur or moss ; it was difficult for the unscientific mind to decide whether it was animal or vegetable. Two drawers of a small chest-of-drawers were crammed to bursting while the bottom drawer was empty. The wardrobe door was never closed, because it is easier to leave a door open than to shut it, and the many articles of clothing hanging from the hooks within swelled out to a gigantic size and also trailed over the threshold on to the floor. Every chair was piled with Stella's possessions. Cardboard boxes protruded from under the bed. On the bed was scattered everything that Stella had worn yesterday, and she flung her golf clubs on the top of them because it was easier (at the moment) to keep them upstairs than to go out of her way to take them downstairs and put them on their proper hook in the hall.

Looking round her bedroom, now, as she flung off her cap and coat, she pictured to herself the delightful room she meant to have in the future, when she was her own mistress and could take matters really into her own hands and not be at the mercy of lodging-house keepers, and

the rather provoking red-tapiness of Ursula. "In perfect freedom is perfect beauty," said Stella to herself. She would have pink curtains. Orpenden would be larger, but nothing like so truly artistic.

So possessed was Stella's mind with her own gilded dreams, that she met Major Kames on the following morning without that sensation of "shock" that she had dreaded and from which she had shrunk the day before. She found herself able to meet his first greeting almost calmly. She had her future before her—waiting for her—all in good time. She did not even grumble because she had to sit the wrong way, side by side with Lionel Kames, in the landaulet. After all, it was better sitting like that than if she had sat facing him and seeing his eyes fixed on Maud all the time. Even if you have given up some man you rather liked, it is a little painful to see him make love to some one else. She was in such good spirits that she even chaffed Kames for possessing a large house, when women like themselves were living in a hut. She said that she was certain Maud would degenerate—she saw signs of it already. In fact she made much cheerful talk as they sped along high roads on their way to Orpenden.

But when at last, after seventy miles lay behind them in the dim grey distance, they passed through a little unspoiled Surrey village and slowed at some massive iron gates, she became silent. The Moncktons had once lived in a house like this; but that was a hundred

years ago—and no member of the family had had the energy or the ability to win back the lost heirloom. It was now in the possession of a noble brewer.

The car rolled smoothly up a long avenue of chestnuts and stood before a fine Elizabethan house, restored, but not spoiled; a dignified place, full of memories—none concerned with the family of Kames!

The ludicrousness of the situation struck Maud irresistibly. She glanced at Stella—at Ursula. Both looked solemn.

"Welcome!" said Kames, who got out of the car with joyful alacrity. His eyes searched for Maud's, though he presented his hand to Ursula.

Maud laughed.

"Is it good enough for you?" whispered Kames, following her closely up the shallow flight of steps.

"Oh, much too good," she said, smiling very much.

They entered the great hall, solemn and dusky in that February afternoon. Up in the gallery the silent portraits peered over at the intruders. There was still a glint of colour in the emblazoned arms in the great mullioned windows, while below, on the hearth, a fierce red fire threw a lurid tint over the rugs and over the polished floor.

"Are there any ghosts here?" asked Maud.

"Lots of 'em," said Kames.

"The spiritual failures, I suppose," said Maud; "members of the old stock who haven't

succeeded in stepping properly into the next world and are hanging on the threshold, not quite human, yet not quite spirit—still interested in Orpenden."

"Just as you like," said Kames. "I'm not particular. Are you ready for tea, Ursula?"

Tea was spread on a round table within the glow of the fire.

Perhaps it was Stella's badly concealed envy that gradually turned Maud's amusement into a sort of condescending appreciation.

Orpenden was as beautiful a house as Maud had ever seen—and Lionel did not praise it, nor did he tell them the price of anything, nor make any exasperating remarks. It was evident that the servants were fond of him. Even Stella observed this reluctantly.

"Ursula," whispered Maud to her sister as they wandered upstairs through the great bedrooms, "if this is to be my home it must be yours, too. I wouldn't be here under any other condition."

Ursula shook her head, though she pressed her sister's arm tenderly. "Oh, no, dear, married people should never be burdened with an intruder!"

"Intruder!" How little Ursula understood! Why, Maud would be thankful for an intruder.

"I couldn't possibly live here," said Maud, no longer in a whisper, but in a very low voice, "unless you are constantly here too."

After dinner, in the drawing-room, Stella made her way straight to the piano and opened it.

Then she examined all the music till Kames came in.

"Are you waiting for an accompaniment?" he asked amicably, seating himself at the piano. Stella's dimples deepened with satisfaction. Maud had only once heard Kames play—and that was on the momentous occasion when Stella sang to him.

"Can't you sing—an old song—one of Grieg's, 'Ich liebe Dich'?" asked Kames, glancing round at Stella. Whether he had ever guessed Stella's intentions towards himself, Maud did not know, but wealthy bachelors are not usually slow at drawing flattering inferences about themselves. Whether he guessed or not, he had not shown himself as anxious to conciliate Stella as he had been to win over Ursula. But just now, his thick, strong, amiable features wore a smile half-indulgent, half-humorous.

Stella could sing the song—rather; and Kames, after playing a prelude of his own, struck into the song.

Stella had brought her blue satin dress with her—her favourite; it did her more justice than any other she had ever had. She was wearing it now, and she stood full of happy expectation. She could imagine the room, full of a well-dressed audience, and it was to this imaginary audience that she sang—her high, strong soprano filling the room, more than filling it. She laid great emphasis on the word "Du," thereby, as she thought, expressing a great emotion.

When the last note died away, she stood

waiting for some word of approval. The first time she had sung to Kames he had not shown any particular appreciation—but perhaps he had not realised her powers!

Ursula was standing near; her figure was erect, but her face was bent a little. Maud had remained at the farther end of the room, by the door, and had sunk on to a couch, out of sight.

"Very nicely warbled," said Kames, still at the piano. "And you make it quite clear that 'Du' is somebody or other."

"What do you mean?" said Stella, her voice sounding a little sharp.

"Look here, Stella, as your future brother-in-law and your fervent well-wisher, I'm going to give you a tip that is worth its weight in gold."

Stella's face had become fixed, and her blue eyes looked like beads of bright turquoise, brighter and more living than the turquoise earrings.

"Really," she said; "well, what is it?"

"Your voice isn't so bad, and you produce it properly—and when a pretty woman with jolly hair and blue eyes gets up and jerks her earrings and opens her mouth and makes a harmless noise, she is bound to please, if she can get into the music halls—but—in private life it's different—you understand?"

"I'm listening," said Stella icily. "You're very polite."

"But you must remember," said Kames,

continuing his own train of thought and talking over the piano-keys with a much more serious expression in his face than he usually wore—"you must remember that in respectable society music doesn't exist—games are what they care about; so if you want to make 'em listen to you for a few minutes, you've got to make yourself very distinctive. I'm telling the wretched truth, for your own sake."

"But there is the serious world of music," said Stella—"you seem to forget that."

"There are serious musicians," said Kames, "but the public who go to the orthodox concert-rooms are mostly women, and they want to hear rubbish: what they want is the sentiment of the boudoir tinged with religion—they want angels to bring them bouquets, lovers, babies, and gowns from Paquin; and the serious musician has got to sing this deuced seriously."

Stella drew a profound breath. She was amazed and also puzzled.

"Anyhow, what was wrong with the way I sang that song?" she said impatiently. "You seem to be a professional critic."

"It was all wrong," said Kames. "First of all, get out of your mind the idea that you can make anything dramatic by emphasising a word—'Du,' 'Du,' '*Du* mein Gedanke,' etc., etc.—that's not art."

"And pray what is art? I mean your idea of art, of course."

"Now, I want to help you," said Kames, in his bluff rapid voice; "I'm going to show you

how to sing 'Ich liebe Dich.' What voice I've got is ruined by smoking—but it'll do for the purpose."

Stella laughed outright. What sublime conceit the man had!—yes, his conceit was positively sublime. "Well," she said, "you do amuse me! Yes. Do sing it."

Maud, from her distant corner, could see Stella's face distinctly, she could see how deeply piqued she was; Kames was not visible, he was hidden behind some palms. Ursula was now sitting near the fire, her head bent, deep in her own thoughts, waiting for the song.

He played the preclude again in his strong though subdued manner, and began.

His voice was in extraordinary contrast to his powerful physique; it was rather husky and without much strength. And yet in spite of that, the virile power with which he breathed out that brief passionate love-song made Maud tremble in her remote corner, and made Stella desperate, convinced, and yet not convinced—conscious that this was art, and that it was different from hers, and yet indignant that it should be different; almost ready to deny that it was. And above this conflict of her vanity and power of self-deception, with her primitive instinct for truth, was another emotion, almost as poignant, though for many days she had fought hard to suppress it—the misery that that song was not sung for her—but for Maud! The rush of self-pitying tears was beyond her control. She tried to keep them back, but one

heavy tear rolled down her cheek and dropped upon her blue satin dress.

Maud saw and understood. She rose noiselessly from her corner, moved to the door and went into the silent hall. The great high mullioned windows now looked solid against the darkness of the night outside. The portraits were dim, the faces looking white and wistfully out at her. Within the glow of the fire, Maud cowered down into a chair, and hiding her face in her hands, shivered from head to foot in that luxurious warmth.

CHAPTER VII

"I've told the man to wait for a quarter of an hour," said Kames, as he entered the Moncktons' sitting-room about a week after their visit to Orpenden. "The train doesn't go till three o'clock, and ten minutes will take us to the station." He was looking round the room as if expecting to see Maud come in.

"Maud hasn't quite finished packing," said Ursula.

"Oh," said Kames, moving about the room restlessly. "What about Lady Dorothy? Is she so tremendously devoted to Maud that she is in such a hurry to have her up there?"

As Kames spoke he stopped by a couch near the windows. He threw himself unceremoniously upon it, and laid his head back on the cushions and closed his eyes.

Ursula looked at Kames's face, his heavy eyelids. She looked at his short thick nose, his strong chin, his thick symmetrical lips now slightly open as if he was breathing heavily. From the very first he had absorbed Ursula into his life, almost forcing her to give him sympathy, and in return treating her with a curiously warm caressing domineering appropriation, such as she had never experienced in her life before, and which she could not resist. But this very

fascination that Kames exerted over her only added to the anxiety with which she anticipated the marriage. Maud did not love him—she would make him suffer—Maud would suffer herself. Unhappiness was inevitable for both of them.

It is only in youth that a man mistakes his pensioner for his friend, or believes that a coryphée makes a faithful or refined companion in her old age. Kames being, by constitution, sceptical and humorous, had steered his way through the crowd of parasites who spring up in the path of wealthy young men, and had kept himself clear of all permanent obligations and entanglements. Now, at the threshold of forty, he longed to enter the Hall of Domestic Peace and Love; he wanted the incorruptible Virtues (well dressed) to bring him a footstool to put his feet upon, while he sat quaffing good wine from the golden bowl of life, and making up his mind to spend the rest of his days in the accomplishment of civic duties.

When he threw himself on the couch he meant Ursula to see that he was worried and feel distressed on his account. She did see it, and stood looking at him uneasily.

"Aunt Dorothy is almost our only relative," she said, in apology, but as she spoke she was painfully aware that what appeared to be Aunt Dorothy's excessive eagerness to see Maud was really Maud's excessive eagerness to get away from Brighton. Was Maud tormented by a vague feverish delusive hope of lightening the

situation; of finding some solution to an insoluble difficulty—if she could be free from Kames—for a day or two? Was that Maud's plan?

"As the old lady doesn't want me to turn up till to-morrow I shall spend the night at Orpenden," said Kames, without opening his eyes. "Come here, Ursula, thou blessed among women, and stroke my hair; I've got a slight headache."

"Lionel, you are spoiled," said Ursula, but she slowly came up to the couch and stood stiffly behind him, wondering what she ought to do.

"Run your fingers through my hair—it's deucedly thick hair for a man who is nearly forty," said Kames. "Soothe me and make me a Christian."

Ursula, who had never in her life touched a man's head before, was amazed at finding herself passing her fingers through his dark hair, and there was silence for a few moments.

"Put more devil into it, my dear girl," said Kames; "you know what I mean."

"I'm afraid I don't," said Ursula. "Do you mean do it harder?"

"No, I mean put some 'nip,' some so-called magnetism, into it."

"I'm afraid I haven't any," said Ursula humbly, though she laughed.

Kames opened his eyes, stretched a hand over his head, took both her hands, slapped his own head with them gently once or twice, put

them against his face and kissed them, and then got up from the couch. He went close to the windows, looked down at his motor standing outside, and then yawned.

The door opened and Maud came in dressed for her journey, followed by Stella. The expression on Kames's face changed instantly. His uneasiness had gone in a moment; he was now fully alert and cheerful.

"Say good-bye," he said to Maud. "Stella, good-bye; I suppose I shan't see you again for a few days. Good-bye, Ursula"—and here he drew her very gravely apart and, bending down, whispered in her ear: "There is something I must say to you."

"What is it?" asked Ursula, looking up at him through her glasses with a rapid frightened look.

"Ursula," he said solemnly, "during my absence, don't do anything that you would be ashamed to tell me of on my return."

Ursula pushed him away with an exclamation, and laughed.

"You are the most extraordinary person," she said. She caught Maud's eyes: they were fixed on her with a curious expression—what did it mean?

"Good-bye, dear," she said, putting her arms round Maud. Why was there such a feeling of vague disaster between the two sisters, such a feeling of wrench, as if there lay between them some final separation? Maud was only going away for a week.

Maud laid her head for a moment on Ursula's neck, and then she kissed her, said "good-bye" huskily and walked out of the room followed by Kames. Ursula and Stella followed them and stood at the open door, watching them get into the motor.

Maud waved her hand, Kames lifted his hat, and they were gone.

How dark and narrow the stairs seemed to Stella! The sitting-room was blank and lifeless. From the windows the sea looked the usual dismal grey of that chalky coast, the water disturbed and untidy, without beauty or meaning. She caught sight of Ursula's face as her half-sister came back into the sitting-room and closed the door behind her. Stella rarely noticed how people's faces looked, but she was struck by Ursula's just then. Did *she* too love that big, burly, foolish, clever, forcible man—or was she only regretting Maud? And the tragedy of it was that Maud, as she drove side by side with him to the station, was ashamed when he pulled her hand out of her muff and pressed it in both of his—ashamed, because she was becoming a slave to his touch, and yet felt no respect for him, no admiration, no sympathy.

"If you like to change your mind and let me motor you to town, it's not too late," said Kames. "We can wire from the station—and I shall have time to get down to Orpenden afterwards."

"No," said Maud quickly; "please don't suggest such a thing. I would rather go as I usually do. Why make a fuss?"

"It's you that makes a fuss," said Kames, "with your damned silly preference for travelling in a third-class carriage along with washer-women, when there's a motor at your very door waiting for you. Try and be reasonable, though you are a woman."

"I am reasonable," said Maud, trying to draw her hand away. "I am poor, and I travel with poor people."

"Well, I will give way on this occasion," said Kames. "But don't forget, Maud, that the first thing you have promised to discuss with your Aunt Dorothy is the date of our marriage. I will let you off till May—but it mustn't be later; there's nothing in the wide world for you to do, or for you to get. Come just as you are. For the matter of that, there isn't any reason why we shouldn't be married in three weeks; you're not a child—neither am I, by all the Powers."

"I will talk it over with Aunt Dorothy," said Maud.

When they got out at the station she took out her little purse. "Will you see my luggage labelled," she said, "while I get my ticket?"

He caught the purse in his hand. "I will get your ticket," he said. "You go and see your luggage labelled."

Maud dared not dispute before the porter and Kames's chauffeur; she was very angry, but she said nothing.

When Kames joined her, she saw him hand a first-class ticket to the luggage inspector.

"Third-class," she said—"I am travelling third."

"First-class," said the inspector, and labelled her baggage.

Maud could have cried with vexation.

"Will you give me my purse back, please?" she said, as they walked along the platform. He gave it her back and she opened it. He had not touched the contents.

"I owe you for the ticket," she said. "I shouldn't have spent the money on first-class if I could have helped it, but you forced me to. Perhaps half a sovereign will be enough"—she held out the coin.

"Don't play the fool, Maud," said Kames bluntly. "Here's a carriage; get into it, my dear." He took her arm and helped her in. She sank down into a corner sullenly, and looked straight before her with the air of an offended potentate.

Kames called for a footwarmer; he arranged her rug over her knees.

"I shall see that nobody gets in with you, and you go straight through to Victoria without a stop," he said.

Maud argued angrily to herself over and over again that his real reason for forcing her to travel first was because he wanted to have the last moment alone with her—a selfish reason.

"You think you are pleasing me," she said, smiling icily, "but you are not. Do you think I don't infinitely prefer the company of governesses and charwomen in a third-class carriage,

to the probability of being boxed up with some wife or daughter of a wealthy Brighton tradesman?" She meant to stab him. He did not seem to feel any sting in what she said, nor to imagine any reference possible to himself.

"Whatever you have done in the past," he said, "you can't possibly travel third now." Maud was about to make a retort, but the guard, passing, shut the carriage-door. Then two or three people came up; after glancing in, and then looking at Kames, they got the door of the next carriage opened for them. The guard whistled.

"Now!" she repeated, leaning out of the open window—"Why now?" She held her hand out stiffly—so that he should understand that she did not intend to offer him any warmer good-bye.

"I couldn't allow my future wife to travel anything but first," he said. The train began to move. She laughed a little.

"Do you think that I shall in any way become more refined or more cultured by becoming your wife?" She spoke out of the window. She had hit him now! He looked surprised, and then his eyes contracted with displeasure. As she was swept beyond him she could see him standing on the platform, raising his hat, his solid features set, his mouth rigid. He had not said "good-bye."

She sank back in her corner and closed her eyes. She was miserable, but she was sure that she was in the right. He was far too

self-confident and too self-satisfied. It was not until she was half-way to London that it occurred to her that he might be seriously offended. What would he do if he was seriously offended? She took the glove off her left hand, and looked at her engagement-ring. It was not the usual diamond hoop: on the band of gold were two magnificent diamonds looped together with a rope of seed pearls. What would he do if he was seriously offended?

Maud began to be uneasy. Why had she, of all times, chosen to rebuke him, however righteously, when she had no opportunity of finding out whether he was likely to resent it—and perhaps to make her suffer for it? Here she was shut up in that railway-carriage helpless and unable to do anything. Suppose he were not to turn up to-morrow at Aunt Dorothy's!

The more Maud thought, the more clear it became to her that she had behaved in a justifiable, but a very imprudent way. She must wire to him the moment she arrived at Victoria. What should she wire? She had neither pencil nor paper. She must make up the sentence in her mind and get it by heart.

After much consideration she decided to write:

"Shall have no peace of mind till I see you again.—MAUD."

Surely that would heal the wound she had made! It was only five minutes to the hour of arrival at Victoria; in five minutes she would be able to write and send off the wire, and he

would find it waiting for him when he reached Orpenden.

She stood up long before it was necessary and folded up the rug and put her things together. She was still standing when the train glided into Victoria. There on the platform was old Jackson to meet her. Instead of the worried and slightly wounded look he usually wore when he had to meet the "young ladies" and help them out of a third-class carriage, he wore the air of dignity that most became him. He saw her at once and hurried forward. Maud could have burst out laughing at the solemn respect with which he saluted her. She was now, evidently, a much more important person than she had been before.

"I must send off a wire, Jackson," she said; "I shall only be five minutes."

It was with a sensation of intense relief that she saw the clerk at the telegraph-office read her wire and apparently understand it. He did not even assure her that there was no place in the British Isles called Orpenden. He accepted it without a murmur.

Once settled in Aunt Dorothy's aged brougham she found herself staring blankly out of the window at the dismal view of Hyde Park on a February afternoon, not thinking of the leafless trees and the sodden grass, but electrified by a sudden fear. Suppose he wasn't on his way to Orpenden? Suppose he was so angry that he had decided to go somewhere else?

He might possibly have gone back to Princes Hotel, and stayed the night there. Then he wouldn't get the telegram! She must wire again—and to Princes Hotel. The carriage was now turning up Brown Street. Maud would write a wire the moment she got in. If only the carriage would go quicker! How intolerable a horse-carriage was after the swiftness of a motor-car!

"There's no wire or anything for me?" she demanded the moment that she was inside the dark London hall.

There was nothing for her. Her ladyship was in the drawing-room, expecting her. Maud went upstairs. She entered the familiar room, saw the chintz-covered chairs, the water-colours she knew by heart, the confusion of knick-knacks on little tables, the photographs; and drowning her greeting and also her aunt's voice came deafening screams of recognition from Kiddie, the dog, whose general nervous excitement was raised to fever-heat by the conviction that all strong selfish emotions ought to be freely and fearlessly expressed. This philosophy of personal development had been enthusiastically instilled into that small canine pet by his mistress, Lady Dorothy Broughton; it is a philosophy that appeals straightaway to the mind of the toy Pomeranian, and does not need the authority of Nietzsche.

"Before I even kiss you," cried Maud, putting her arms round the neck of a short, dark, elderly lady with grey piled-up hair and a beaked nose

like Ursula's—"Before I even kiss you I must rush off a wire."

"My dear," shouted Aunt Dorothy, trying to raise her voice above the noise Kiddie was making—"You *are* in love!"

CHAPTER VIII

"Now, Maud," said Lady Dorothy, "now that the wire has been sent off and your mind is at rest, I want to know all about Major Kames."

Maud had taken off her veil, and seated herself ready to pour out tea. Lady Dorothy sat down in a large easy-chair near to her, and held Kiddie on her lap. The old familiar drawing-room was full of lights and shadows cast by the flickering fire and breaking the premature dusk of a London afternoon. Brown velvet curtains shut off the back drawing-room, and these curtains were never drawn aside unless Lady Dorothy had one of her rare dull dinner-parties or At Homes, to which some of her old cronies gathered. On those occasions the drawing-room was stretched to its full size. It was full of incongruous furniture and miscellaneous chairs, ornaments of no beauty and not much value, fatiguing photographs of friends, cushions made of colours that did not blend well; and yet the whole effect was of space and comfort and brightness.

"Where is Kiddie's cup?" asked Maud. "Is this it?" and she touched a white cup ornamented with pink roses.

"Yes," said Lady Dorothy, "that's his."

Kiddie barked two or three times with that

ear-piercing quality of noise peculiar to small hysterical dogs.

"Did he break the old one?" asked Maud.

"It wasn't his fault," said Lady Dorothy. "Jackson put it out of his reach, poor angel, and he broke it trying to get at it. Jackson doesn't really care for the pet. You remember he never did. He looks after him merely as a duty: he doesn't throw his heart and soul into what he does for him—what a difference it makes! And it's such a pity—it just prevents Jackson from being a real help to me. If people only would realise what they might be."

"When did you buy the cup?" asked Maud.

"A week ago. It took my fancy: simple little roses."

"It doesn't go very well with the service," said Maud, repressing her smile.

"Kiddie doesn't know that," said Lady Dorothy, looking sharply into Maud's face and winking both her eyes.

"No, he doesn't," said Maud. "He's mercifully spared."

"Well, tell me, child, about Major Kames; I am dying to hear everything," said Aunt Dorothy.

Maud filled Kiddie's cup with milk, put a dash of tea in it, and placed it close to the edge of the tray.

"The cup is a very bad match, Aunt Dorothy," she said.

"I really oughtn't to have bought it," returned her aunt. "I thought I could carry

the colour of the service in my mind, and at the time I really thought it went well with the cup, but it didn't. I had meant to tell Jackson to give me a cup of the service to take with me to the shop, but at the last moment I forgot. There are always so many things to think of. What I really ought to have done was to have sent the cup back, but unfortunately Kiddie was present when I unfastened the paper, and he saw the cup. After that I scarcely liked to take it away. You see he understood at once that it was his, and one can't explain everything. One is to a certain extent on one's honour with a dumb animal."

"He's not dumb," said Maud.

"Well, he can't take in complicated argument, and one doesn't want to destroy a dog's confidence, and so that is the history of the cup. Now, about Major Kames! I'm anxious to know how and when and where and why, and everything about him."

"Kiddie will guess everything," said Maud, "when he sees him, don't you think so, Aunt Dorothy?"

"I'm sure of it," said Aunt Dorothy. "He never makes a mistake."

"I wish I had Kiddie's insight into character," said Maud. "I always make mistakes."

"Yes, but Kiddie is nearer to the Great Fount of Nature. He divines," said Lady Dorothy. Then, after she had quieted down from the sublimity of her remark, she looked as if she were going to say again: "And now

about Major Kames." So Maud said hastily: "So Kiddie was ill—the other day?"

"He was ill," replied Lady Dorothy, caressing her dog. "The Vet said he had taken a chill. It was during the first day of that severe frost and, of course, his thick jacket was being cleaned. I told Jackson not to let it go till February was over—however, he's well now. Well, dear, do let us talk about Major Kames. I can't tell you what a surprise it was to me. I hadn't the slightest suspicion there was anything——"

"Oh, please give me Kiddie's cup for his second supply," said Maud. "I was quite forgetting. You never told me if the Vet ordered massage. That is, I believe, the latest thing for internal inflammation, though I should have thought it would have made it much worse. What did he order?"

Lady Dorothy put down her own cup. "Complete rest," she said solemnly.

"Complete rest," repeated Maud.

"And I told him that it was impossible to give Kiddie complete rest, the darling's brain is so active."

Kiddie's second cup being placed before him, he lapped it up languidly, and then turned his face towards Maud and stared hard at her.

"What is it, darling?" murmured Lady Dorothy. "He knows that something has happened. He saw it the moment you came into the room. I never saw anything like the insight the dog has. Does Kiddie know all about its cousin Maud-y-Maud? I shall be very much

interested to see how he behaves when he sees Major Kames to-morrow. It will be a real test."

Maud raised her eyebrows and went on with her tea.

"Do you mean that I ought to break off the engagement if Kiddie doesn't like him?" she asked, after a moment's pause.

Lady Dorothy laughed. "Not quite that—but, of course, I count on Kiddie's taking a fancy to him. Well, Maud, he has given you a charming ring. I didn't notice it till this moment. He has begun well. When my poor nephew George marries he won't be able to afford any trinkets," and Lady Dorothy sighed, and looked as if she were thinking deeply.

"Does he come to see you often?" asked Maud, in a low voice.

"Pretty often," said Lady Dorothy. "He is a dear good boy; he has only two faults—he isn't kind to Kiddie, and he doesn't think enough of his own future. I understand that there is no money in a University career, but he would go in for it—whereas he had a splendid offer of business when he took his degree at Cambridge. Austin has all the money and does the gentleman. George knew he would have practically nothing, and he might have been at his age, twenty-eight, rolling in money—as the saying is; but instead of this he goes in for science, and talks as if we'd nothing in this wide world to do but to find out what we're made of——"

"It is rather interesting, don't you think?" said Maud.

"No, I don't," said Lady Dorothy. "I would far rather not know. Well, you haven't told me yet anything about Major Kames. He's at present merely a name to me. You didn't say in your letter even whether he was old or young."

"What do you call young?" asked Maud, her voice of interest changing to one of lassitude in a moment. "For instance, Kiddie is only six years old, but he isn't young."

"He's past the verge of middle age—I suppose," said her Aunt Dorothy. And this expression, middle age, struck a note of sadness upon the strings of Lady Dorothy's heart. Dogs' lives are so much shorter than the lives of human beings. They come and they go swiftly—middle age is succeeded rapidly by a year or two of what might be called elderly life, and then the grey hairs come upon the once red brows and chin, the time of bounce and frolic is over, the walk is slow, the steps uncertain, and as old age gathers its months together, death comes at last—and what—after death? Lady Dorothy was half inclined to favour the idea of transmigration of souls. A good dog might become a man in the next life—a thoroughly respectable man of no particular talent or social position.

"My difficulty," said Maud, "about transmigration is that so few people will ever get to heaven if they have to wait till they cease to care for anything on earth. In all my life I've never met anybody who had got to the right

stage—have you ? As far as I can make out," she continued, " in Nirvana you will only meet Orientals—and perhaps St. Francis and St. John of the Cross."

Lady Dorothy's mind had slipped off the subject. Maud's argument required more concentrated thought than she was accustomed to make, and she took refuge in conversation with Kiddie. After that, Jackson came in to put on the lights and to poke the fire, so that when Maud gathered up her gloves and veil and went out of the drawing-room, Lady Dorothy suddenly awoke to the fact that, in spite of her ardent curiosity and her real interest in her niece, she was not any nearer to knowing all about Major Kames than she had been before Maud's arrival.

Maud made her way up the narrow, dark stairs, and walked into the bedroom she usually occupied when she was staying at Brown Street. She was amazed to find the room cold and empty. She rang the bell, and when the maid appeared she was taken into another room, one reserved for important persons ! Her luggage was already in possession of Lady Dorothy's own maid ! Maud looked round the room. So she had become an important person ! A transformation had taken place in her : from being nobody she had become somebody—and all owing to—Major Kames !

Lionel Kames ! And what made Lionel Kames important ?

Apparently the whole world, even a harmless person like her Aunt Dorothy, conspired with

the powers of Evil to support Mammon. Wealth was respected and poverty was not; and what about the human personality involved? That seemed to count for very little! What was the good of trying to blind herself to the fact that as Major Kames's wife she was something different from, something far superior to what she was as merely Miss Maud Monckton. In the face of that undeniable transformation how could she dream even for a moment of breaking off the engagement? The idea was absurd! Let us all worship Mammon, and give him the credit he deserves. What in this world is a woman likely to get from satisfying a sensitive conscience? It was possible—she did not think it was probable—but it was just possible, that even Ursula vaguely, perhaps unconsciously, felt that Maud was more important than she had been, though less virtuous! What a horrible idea!

Why has human nature been soaked to the very bones in snobbishness? Cinderella triumphs because in the end wealth and power are at her service. Virtue prevails, that is true—but it must be Virtue crowned with gold. For nineteen centuries men have clung with a tiger ferocity to the regalia of the Founder of Christianity in the conviction that without it He would be useless to them. They want to look round and boast to the world: "Our Lord and Master can trace His birth (see exclusive and perfectly reliable documents) directly to the Supreme Potentate of the Universe," for, if not, all the

pride of the world with its princely palaces and its priceless treasures, its inventions, all that belongs to sight and touch, the very crown of Human Effort, may crumble and dissolve into nothing, and we, sceptics as we are, be left alone with a cold, attenuated, starlike memory of a strange crucified Man and His Faith in the Unseen. Maud got some relief for her feelings in this accusation against the " religious " world in general.

CHAPTER IX

It was all right! A wire had come from Orpenden from Major Kames that evening. She was to expect him at four o'clock the following day.

Now that she was certain of his forgiveness she wondered how she could have doubted it. Men in love always forgive—they are not capable of being really critical. If Maud had any regret in her mind for what she had said to him, it was because she had not spoken strongly enough. Culture and refinement she had already, and he had not, but she *was* socially uplifted by her engagement to him. In the eyes of the world third-class might be good enough for Miss Maud Monckton, but it wasn't suitable for Mrs. Kames. Maud was almost inclined now to pride herself on having had the boldness to utter a sarcasm that was good for Lionel's morals, though it was risky from a diplomatic point of view. She took a vow, there and then, that she would never increase his natural conceit by admitting to him that she was aware that she gained anything by her marriage with him.

"Are there any relatives of Major Kames that you will have to go and see while you are here?" asked Lady Dorothy.

Maud had never heard Kames mention the word "relative." Somehow she had not thought

about it—being profoundly occupied with the question whether she could endure Major Kames himself. Her thoughts had never wandered so far from this central question as to ask herself whether she could endure his relatives, or even whether he had any. All she knew was that his father and mother were not living, and that he had been the only child—and heir of his father's accumulated wealth.

"I don't know if he has any relatives," said Maud.

"He must have relations," said Lady Dorothy. "Everybody has—and he must have intimate friends."

"There are all the people round Orpenden. He seems to entertain a great deal when he's there," said Maud; "I've heard him speak of friends, but not of relatives."

"What were the Kameses?" asked Lady Dorothy.

"Wealthy tradespeople," said Maud bluntly.

"Oh!" said Lady Dorothy.

"And if he has any relatives they will, of course, be tradespeople," cried Maud. "I must ask about them—as, of course, I should like to be introduced to them."

Maud put her nose in the air as she spoke. After the humiliation of being made "somebody" merely because of her relationship to Major Kames, it was rather agreeable to feel that he needed her protection—he and his relatives—it equalised the give and take; it soothed her vanity.

Lady Dorothy looked at her and stroked Kiddie's head without replying.

"Money is everything," said Maud with an air of authority that she would not have assumed on her last visit to Brown Street. "The cheap houses in seaside towns are full of people like myself who have birth, and no particular ability, and no money—who have drifted down through incompetent ancestors, and now count for nothing in modern society. Nobody has any use for us. The one question nowadays is—In what style can you live and entertain?"

"There are some gentlemen left," said Lady Dorothy, vaguely and yet firmly.

"Of course," said Maud, "just as there are some Christians left. But do they count? Just look, Aunt Dorothy—there is that little man, General Broughton's son, whom Stella calls 'Jumper,' because he moves so slowly; there's your typical modern man—I don't say gentleman, but 'man of the world'—he can just manage to cheep out the latest music-hall phrase. He has birth, but it isn't that that keeps him going—he happens to have money. If he was poor he would be employed to lick down envelopes, for he hasn't brains enough to address them correctly."

"My dear Maud, you talk like a Socialist," said Lady Dorothy, who was beginning to tire of the subject, and indeed she had never raised it.

"I'm not a Socialist. What I should like to be is—a Christian—but I can't," and Maud

turned away and began looking at herself in the gilt mirror that hung on the wall near.

"I think you are sometimes a little morbid, child," said Lady Dorothy.

"I am quite sure I am," said Maud, "because I am haunted with the idea of God—God—God, instead of realising that what is of world-wide importance is the daily round here and at our lodgings in Brighton."

Lady Dorothy was so eager to meet Major Kames, so full of curiosity about him, that she had returned from her drive with Maud earlier than was necessary, and they were both in the drawing-room waiting for him to make his appearance when this conversation took place. Lady Dorothy did not quite grasp Maud's remarks, but she replied, "It's not healthy"; and then added:

"You do look well in that dress, child," for she caught the reflection of Maud in the mirror and Maud's self looking at it. It was a relief to change the talk to something that was not introspective.

"I look well, for me," said Maud. She did look very beautiful, for the dress was a pale fawn and made Maud's hair and eyes conspicuous. She looked distinguished, and her cheeks were slightly tinged with the excitement of wondering how Lionel Kames would look at her after the quarrel—what he would say!

Perhaps the suppressed emotion in the minds of both ladies communicated itself to the red Pomeranian—for he was more than usually

troublesome, moving round and round in Lady Dorothy's lap, and then suddenly springing off it with a nerve-destroying bark, because of some imaginary and hostile noise that he pretended to hear.

When a real, though faint, sound of the front-door bell caught the dog's ear he burst into a paroxysm of rage, which Lady Dorothy explained as the result of their having come in so early from their drive—defrauding him of half an hour of fresh air.

"Don't you think he had better go out," said Maud, "and be brought in later?"

But Lady Dorothy was sure that after a moment or two he would quiet down.

"After the first shock of seeing Major Kames is over," she said, "he will take in the situation."

Maud looked angrily at the dog, but felt helpless. There was no time to argue for the door opened and Jackson announced "Major Kames."

"Now, it's only a nice-y-nice-y man," murmured Lady Dorothy to the palpitating fury in her arms as she gathered him up and rose to meet her future nephew-in-law.

Maud watched the meeting—watched the tall powerful figure and the bent head as he kissed Lady Dorothy's hand and stood a moment looking down at her with his large brown eyes measuring her from head to foot; then he looked swiftly at Maud. His forgiveness was not complete. He had not forgotten! There was a certain fixity in his eyes that Maud had not seen

there before, a reserve in the composure of his mouth. Still there he was, safely hers, and her Aunt Dorothy had already fallen in love with him, and was assuring the frantic Kiddie that he would soon get to like, beyond words, the new, kind, good friend of little dogs.

Maud held out her hand and then leaned forward and kissed her future husband's cheek in spite of her aunt's presence—then she stood back holding both his hands, and laughed.

"You are sorry to see me?" she asked.

"I've been dreading it ever since I saw you last," said Kames, and he laughed too, but not quite in the old way. Lady Dorothy could not hear what they said because of Kiddie.

"You mustn't think that Kiddie dislikes you, Major Kames," screamed Lady Dorothy; "the poor darling barks at everybody, he is so sensitive and highly strung. Dogs are just as sensitive as human beings—often more so—and the difficulty is that my poor darling doesn't like to be left alone a single instant—not a single moment. It isn't the poor little atom's fault that he is nervous; he was born so, and we must take people as they are, mustn't we?"

"We've jolly well got to," said Kames, taking a proffered seat. "All the same, Lady Dorothy you're too kind to that little brute; you're ruining his immortal soul and sending him to a place where you'll never meet him again. Boo-ooh!" he added, throwing his voice in a deep threatening manner at the astonished dog.

"How unkind!" exclaimed Lady Dorothy. "You really are too hard! It isn't the poor little-ittle atom's fault that he is nervous. But he really is feeling better. He likes you, Major Kames. I told Maud he would. The pet has wonderful insight."

"I'll let him off with purgatory," said Kames.

Perhaps it was some subconscious understanding of the gravity of Kames's argument that overawed the dog, but anyhow Kiddie's barks had grown less tense and less rapid: they cooled down, so to speak, into low prolonged growls, each finishing off with a savage yelp; and then finally he settled down in a position from which he could cover Kames with eyes that were full of scornful suspicion.

The truce was made the most of by Maud, who strained every nerve to make herself charming—not merely because she wanted to obliterate the disagreeable impression she had made on Lionel yesterday, but because she wanted to give her Aunt Dorothy no opportunity of making secret or pronounced comments on her engagement.

Kames thawed beneath the warmth with which both women treated him. His face relaxed and he talked freely, taking Lady Dorothy completely into his confidence. Maud did not know whether to be amused or gratified at seeing her Aunt Dorothy becoming coquettish under the stimulation of his presence. It was amazing how easily he drew her into the circle of his influence. Was it conscious on his part

or unconscious?—was it merely the magnetic attraction a large body has for a smaller one, an attraction that cannot be helped or prevented?

"How absurd life is!" thought Maud; "and the worst of it is that we are too profoundly interested in it to see the absurdity."

Everything was running smoothly till Jackson opened the door. Then all Maud's self-complacence and peace vanished in one second of time, and she sat stiffly staring at George Broughton as he walked into the room.

Broughton did not need any of Lady Dorothy's explanations when she introduced the two men to each other. He shook hands with Kames cordially, and the two men stood together talking. What a contrast! Both were of the same height, but there the likeness ended. They were men of utterly different type—different as steel is from cast iron, although the material out of which both are made is the same—so thought Maud. She had so far lost her self-control that she got up from her seat and moved away, afraid of hearing Kames's voice, afraid of his phrases—everything that would contrast him with George Broughton.

She moved to the other side of the room where the piano stood by the closed brown velvet curtains. She opened the piano.

"Aunt Dorothy," she called out, "I didn't tell you that Lionel plays on the piano. Wouldn't you like to hear him play?"

Of course Lady Dorothy would be charmed to hear him play. She was indeed ready to be

charmed with Major Kames under any circumstances. "And George, come here and have your tea," she called.

"Go and play," said Maud, coming up to the two men and taking Kames's arm—"George, won't you have tea? Aunt Dorothy has poured you out a cup."

So she separated them. Kames did as he was told. He seated himself at the piano. The little group near the fire could see his face well; the face undeniably had a certain power, Maud could not deny it.

Kames struck some chords in the bass with a force that made Lady Dorothy wince. Kiddie sprang to his feet in her lap and barked in his shrillest tone.

"Be quiet, darling," said Lady Dorothy. Kiddie barked with greater rapidity. "Don't, darling, it's nice-y-music-y-music," implored his mistress.

But Kiddie had another opinion. Maud went to the bell. "Shall I ring for Jackson?" she said.

Lady Dorothy spoke loving words of sweet persuasion into her pet's ear, but to no purpose. Maud rang the bell.

Major Kames meanwhile had turned round in his seat, and was asking which of the two performers Lady Dorothy would rather hear. Broughton got up and leaned over his aunt's chair.

"Let me have the little beggar," he said. By a superhuman effort Kiddie was imprisoned

by his mistress's two hands and smothered away in lace and shawls, so that only muffled sounds could be heard snorting out of the confused heap in her lap.

"Don't take him, George," she cried. "He's trying not to bark; he's so considerate, he wants to try—and bear it! Please go on, Major Kames."

But Kames had already risen, and to add to the confusion Jackson announced names at the door, and two elderly ladies, chums of Lady Dorothy's, entered the room.

Broughton made a dive at the bundle on his aunt's lap and pulled out the half-suffocated Kiddie. In spite of his aunt's protests he held Kiddie up by his tail.

"Jackson," he called. "Wait. Take Kiddie."

"George, how can you behave like this?" said Lady Dorothy angrily.

"It'll do him a world of good," said Broughton, dangling the darling in the air and going to meet Jackson half-way across the room. "It sends the blood to the brain and helps to nourish it."

What Lady Dorothy's two intimate friends really thought of the performance was not visible. They maintained a diplomatic attitude of sympathy towards all parties and merely uttered colourless exclamations.

Kiddie alone was silent—being unable to articulate with his head hanging down. He was full of suppressed rage. It was not merely because of the great indignity which he suffered, but he had been deprived of the opportunity

of expressing his opinion about the entrance of two new people: he had lost one of those valuable educational moments—and there are too few of them—in which the sacred personality is enabled to develop itself by active contact with the rich objectivity of life.

Jackson received the insulted animal into his arms, and hastily left the room.

Lady Dorothy was too much upset by the occurrence to know what she was saying to her visitors. Broughton took the opportunity of going behind Maud, who was standing apart, and asked after her sisters in a low voice as if it were a mystery. That was why he had come that afternoon; to ask after Stella! Maud read it in his eyes. She told him that Ursula and Stella were both well. He looked as if it was a matter of supreme importance and inexpressible pleasure, and then fell silent. So he loved Stella with all the freshness and warmth and simplicity of an unspoiled nature! Standing so close to him, his face only a little above the level of hers, Maud forgot for a moment the presence of Kames, of her aunt, of everybody, and searched his features with a tragic curiosity for truer knowledge of the character that lay below them. She gazed at him as if at some picture that symbolised that which her spirit searched for and could not find in the sordid presentations of ordinary life.

Broughton stood, with his eyes lowered, quite unconscious of her for a moment. Then some involuntary movement on her part brought

his eyes to hers. Broughton smiled. Was he thinking of her already—as his sister?

"I must go," said Kames's voice at her ear. "Will you come to the door with me?"

She had to answer. In a confusion she saw him take his leave—she heard him offer Lady Dorothy a box at the theatre the following night; she heard her aunt accept, and she followed him to the door. Must she go out of the drawing-room with him? She could have cried aloud with self-pity! Kames opened the door and ordered her with his eyes to go out before him.

She obeyed and the door was closed—they stood together outside alone.

Maud tried to pull herself together. She even laughed, though there was nothing in the world to laugh at. Kames said nothing, but he put his arm round her.

"You can understand now why nobody who can help it comes to No. 2, Brown Street?" said Maud, pretending to support herself by putting her hand on his arm, but really pushing him away.

"Why do you push me away?" demanded Kames swiftly.

He drew her away from the door towards the head of the stairs with an arm that would allow of no resistance.

He was bracing himself to say something—something that was deeply painful to him, and which he said almost harshly as he suddenly turned upon her and looked into her eyes.

"There's never been anything between you and Broughton?"

Maud's eyes flickered.

"No," she said.

"Nothing?"

"I've told you," she answered.

"You've told me," he replied, and he still waited.

"Nothing. Less than nothing."

"What do you mean?" he questioned, speaking in his most rapid tone.

"He has never thought of me for a moment," said Maud.

"How do you know that?"

"I do know it."

"Then you know that he is interested in another woman?" He had clasped both her arms with his hands, and looking down into her face, seemed to draw the words from her by sheer insistence.

"Yes."

"Who?"

Maud closed her lips and then opened them and said "Stella!"

Kames threw back his head. He laughed.

"The poor innocent devil!" he said and he drew Maud on to the head of the stairs.

Maud tried in a feeble way to push his arm from her waist.

"It's hard lines that some of the best fellows in the world make such fool marriages. These scientific chaps—these philosophers and fellows who work in laboratories—don't know anything about women. Give 'em a plaster figure or a grey goose with a pair of earrings clapped to its

head and it's all one to them till it's too late. Because a saint in the heat of the day succumbs to a glass of beer, it's hard lines that he should be compelled to spend the rest of his life in the taproom."

"Don't speak in such an insulting way," burst out Maud, trying to wrench away his hand.

"I'm not insulting *you*," he said; "I wouldn't for the whole world, though I doubt if you could say the same to me."

He took her head in his hands and held it, looking down at her as if her face was the page of a difficult book.

Maud did not reply; she lowered her eyelids till they were nearly closed, and she knitted her brow and waited to be released.

"A man who loves may be willing to be kicked now and again, provided it is made up for in the proper way; but you're the hardest woman in the world to deal with—harder——" Here Kames pulled himself up sharply.

"You mean, harder than any of the women you have known." Maud had raised her eyes and flashed a look of anger at him.

"No, 'pon my honour," said Kames. "I wouldn't say such things to you"—a dull red colour coming into his face. "I'm not an infant, Maud—you know that," he went on, drawing her close to him; "but whatever I have been I am now at this moment yours absolutely, and shall always be—there is no other woman in the world—you are everything to me—everything."

CHAPTER X

They were sitting at lunch in the long, narrow dining-room at No. 2, Brown Street. Kiddie was seated by the fire in his basket. Jackson brought in a letter and handed it to Lady Dorothy.

"From George!" said Lady Dorothy, as soon as she had put up her glasses.

Maud went on eating without making any reply.

Her Aunt Dorothy tore open the letter, spread it out and began to read.

"Great news," she said, putting down the letter. "But I knew it would come to that. So, there's both of you off. Only Ursula left—and 'pon my word, I was beginning to think that *you* would follow in her steps and remain an old maid. But I was wrong, you were waiting for Major Kames, my dear—the most sensible thing you could do. A very charming man, and with the wealth he has got he is a sugar plum. Now George is going to marry Stella. Do you hear, Maud!" The good lady took up the letter again to read such important family news to her niece.

"Don't read it aloud," said Maud. "It's not right, not proper." She would have risen from the table if she had dared.

But Lady Dorothy did not hear, and if she

had heard she would have thought the remark most absurd.

"Did you guess it was coming?" she asked.

"Yes," said Maud.

"Well, here goes," she began, reading aloud in a jaunty voice that was mellowed by satisfaction.

"My Dear Aunt Dorothy,

"I am letting you know before any one else because I owe it to you that I ever met her—I speak of Stella Monckton—to whom I am just engaged. I know only too well that I am only a poor man. ('Quite true,' interposed Lady Dorothy. 'I think he has two hundred a year of his own, not a penny more, and I suppose his salary is something absurd.') A poor man, but with the encouragement and help of a girl like Stella any man would be able to realise the very best that is in him. That realisation she puts before all others for the man she loves—even if it means the sacrifice of her own career. She is the most unselfish woman I have ever met. Think what a stimulus she will be to my work—to all that I hold most worth living for! She is more than all I had ever hoped for. I must catch the five o'clock train to Brighton, to-day, but shall run in and see you and my future sister-in-law, if I can, between three and four.

"Your affectionate nephew,

"George Broughton."

"Dear, good, sentimental fellow," added

Lady Dorothy, "I don't quite understand what he means by Stella's career—do you Maud? Stella's career?"

Maud had placed her elbow on the table, and was resting her forehead on her hand.

"I don't know," said Maud, trying to speak distinctly.

"Well, the boy is very much in love," said Lady Dorothy, folding the letter. "He's not a catch by any means, but if any girl wants a really good man—there he is—if he only would behave with more kindness to Kiddie. I can't think why he ill-treats him, it's not like his general character, but perhaps scientific people are like that. I don't like it. I must stay in and see him when he comes. After all it doesn't much matter putting off those calls—and we got plenty of fresh air this morning! Dear me!"

Lady Dorothy got up from the table, carrying the letter with her.

"What will poor Ursula say to you two girls going off and leaving her alone? However, such things can't be helped! Some people must be left behind." Lady Dorothy was so much excited by the news that she did not notice Maud's extraordinary silence.

Maud walked behind her upstairs, carrying Kiddie in her arms to her aunt's bedroom.

"You can see George even if he comes before I am up, and you can send him up to me. It will be delightful news to tell Major Kames when he comes to dinner! I suppose George didn't know when he was here yesterday

afternoon. Perhaps he had only just written to Stella, and didn't get her answer till last night or the first thing this morning! Dear me, I wish somebody would take pity on Ursula! Occasionally women of her age marry—but not often, and though the dearest woman in the world, she's not what one would call a likely person—in that respect." Lady Dorothy began preparing herself to lie down.

"I really shan't let Kiddie see George. The poor angel will not have forgotten the way he was treated yesterday and will be in fits if he sees the unkind-y-kind." Lady Dorothy turned round and stared up at her niece who was acting as maid to her at the moment.

"Shall I ask Eugenie to take him out for a walk between half-past three and half-past four?"

"Perhaps you had better," said Maud.

"Eugenie is always grumpy when I ask her—people are so selfish about dogs! However, ring the bell, dear, I'll make the venture—I'll brave the dragon."

Maud rang the bell and after waiting for a moment till the maid appeared, she went out of the room and closed the door softly and went down into the drawing-room. She looked out of the window.

It was one of those piercingly cold February days that forbid any thought of the coming spring, grey pavement, grey roadway, grey sky topping the grey houses opposite—the chilliness of the air could be seen. She went to the same

gilt mirror into which she had looked on the previous afternoon, and which had reflected back an image of brilliant graceful womanhood. What did it reflect now? She went close up to it and gazed at a white face.

She went upstairs to her room. She dressed for going out and put on her furs. Then she rang the bell and told the maid that if Dr. Broughton called her ladyship was to be told at once. She explained that she was going out herself for a walk, and was not sure when she would be in.

The very sting of the cold wind outside was a physical relief to the girl. Also it is easier to control any emotion when one is walking fast. She scarcely noticed where she was going except that she knew she was walking in the Park and pacing along westwards. The people she met seemed to her, in her present mood, more like dressed figures than human beings. They all walked as if untouched by any keen emotion; even though one here or there moved with an unusual haste, it was in order to save time, not because of any driving force behind—moral or spiritual. Had all these people forgotten that they were the victims of a strange, inevitable destiny? Didn't they know that they were without their consent forced into this world, loving or hating, and crying out for a God who makes no answer? She left the Park behind her and went along streets—street after street, and at last she fancied that her steps were followed by the steps of another. A sudden fear came

over her, interrupting her thoughts. She was not accustomed to walk alone in London. Where was she? The streets were long and the houses the homes of the mediocrity—neither rich nor poor; there were not many people passing up or down them. She looked up the road to see if she could see a policeman, or a taxi stand. She could see nothing, the road was empty. She walked faster and turned—because she feared to turn back and face what might turn out to be a persistent shadow—into a side road. The dismal houses looked down upon her without a sign of life.

Suddenly she saw a spire; a few yards off was a red brick church. The gates were open, the door was open. Beside it was a large notice announcing a "Mission," and giving the hours of the services.

She pushed the inner door, and found herself inside a large, bare church. She would look for the sacristan and ask him the way to the nearest taxi stand.

It was dusky inside and the lights hanging before the altar were conspicuous bright objects. At the farthest end of the aisle the vestry door stood open and two men talked within. She could see that one was a priest and the other a sacristan. The priest was tall and thin and angular in his cassock, the sacristan was short and stout. Maud could see that as she moved aside into a chapel and sat down on a chair to wait till they had finished their conversation.

In a few moments she heard the priest coming

towards her. She looked up. He had entered the chapel. He was middle-aged, his light hair was mixed with grey, his features were pronounced, almost severe, and his pale grey eyes had a strange look in them, a look of penetrative humour, and a look of fanaticism. It was a rare combination. It almost alarmed Maud. She rose hastily, as if to escape.

"Did you want to speak to me?" he asked.

"I am so ashamed," began Maud, "I only came here because I had lost my way and couldn't find a taxi."

Wearing an old shabby cassock, the man she addressed was yet a great gentleman in appearance, in manner, in every detail. Maud found it difficult to remove her eyes from his face.

Psychologists tell us that whole schemes of thought create themselves below the margin of our consciousness, and often lie there dormant until something happens to lift them to the surface and we are surprised at our new and unexpected view of things.

Maud had been unaware that she had any craving to unburden her thoughts to any one, but as she stood there in the twilight of that February afternoon in the quiet refuge of that chapel there came upon her a great longing to put her case before an impartial critic whom she would never meet again. What brought that inner want to consciousness was the personality of this man. Had he been uncouth in appearance or jocose in manner, had he worn an air of spiritual

unction, she would have left that chapel with her secret undisclosed. As it was at his bidding she seated herself again, and began staring hard at her muff, doubting how she should begin.

He sat down on a chair in front of her, and leaned over the back so as to face her.

"I will get you a taxi later on," he said.

"Thanks so much," said Maud. "Thank you——" but she found no further words, and yet she waited for them to come.

"You have something to say about yourself," he suggested. He spoke in such an impersonal manner and with such consummate ease, that Maud felt that she must always have intended speaking to him about herself, only that the opportunity had not arisen before.

"No one will interrupt us," he said, "and I have time. It is the business of my life to listen as well as to talk. Are you troubled with religious difficulties?"

"I have no religious difficulties," said Maud, "because I have no religion."

CHAPTER XI

Here Maud looked very straight into the face opposite to her. She was getting accustomed to the dimness of the chapel, lit only by lamps hanging before the altar close beside them, and a light in the aisle by the vestry door. She thought she saw in that face opposite to her the physical traces of a life of nervous strain. It was as if the sculptor had moulded features of an intellectual type, features of a man in the full strength of his age, and then had scored the forehead and the lips with a chisel. But the pale grey eyes were undimmed and ardent. Five minutes ago she had never seen this man, he was an utter stranger; yet she had made an admission to him such as one makes rarely to an intimate friend. Because he looked a notable person was she taking him for more than he was worth? Suppose that in spite of the distinction of his face he was a mere sacerdotalist, satisfied with the husk of Catholicism and only capable or reiterating commonplaces.

"There is something else you want to talk about?" he suggested. He did not show a flicker of surprise at her dismissal of religion.

"There are things——" Maud began, "but why should I trouble you?"

"You are going to take some step you are

doubtful about," he suggested, "and would like to talk it over?" He spoke as if it were the most natural thing in the world that she, a perfect stranger to him, should confide in him—it seemed to Maud at that moment the most natural thing. Indeed, it seemed as if he had sprung into existence for that purpose. There he was, waiting. She lowered her eyes now and spoke down at the muff on her lap. She was determined to speak without any emotion. She would put her question in the most impersonal way she could.

"It is a little discouraging to an ordinary profane person like myself," she began, "to find that really good men have so little discrimination. For instance why does a man, who has all the world to choose from, a man of real mental ability and of moral refinement, why does he insist on marrying a—pair of turquoise earrings?"

She raised her eyes in a flash and met the grey ones that were looking at her.

"It is not a conundrum," she added, leaning forward and looking fixedly at him.

There was the very slightest contraction of his closed lips, but no smile; the smile lay behind them.

"No man has all the world to choose from," he said.

Maud listened almost without drawing her breath.

"If the man is all you say, how many women will he have met who are his match?"

That was true. How many? Had she ever herself met, among the many girls she knew, Broughton's match? Was she herself his match?

"You must remember," he went on, "that Nature cares nothing for the individual. Nature cares only for the continuation of the race. If men and women in the flower of their age went about the world able to see each other clearly and critically would they, as they do now, rush madly into bondage for the rest of their lives? They would weigh and hesitate—until youth was past. So Nature has wisely, for her own purposes, made them blind. Marcus Aurelius marries Faustina, Octavia marries Antony."

"Then you don't think 'falling in love' is sacred?" she said, as if summing up his words into one sentence. She leaned forward and spoke slowly. "Knowing that love is blind, you would not blame a woman if she married a man she didn't love?"

This was the question of her life. He was to decide. He was to judge dispassionately, from the point of a man who is standing back from the stage and looking on life as a spectator, a spectator who is impartial, yet profoundly serious.

"'Falling in love' and 'love'—are two different matters," he said.

Maud tried to look at him without flinching. She noticed without moving her own eyes from his, minute details about this man that had hitherto escaped her. She observed the length of his hands, the gauntness of his wrists and

elbows. She observed that his lips were moulded with a certain flatness and thickness almost to the corners, that he had a scar upon his chin, that his ears were small, and that his grizzled hair curled at his ears. The absolute simplicity of his dress, the straight lines of his cassock and collar band only added to his look of austere dignity.

"Mere 'falling in love' often ends in 'falling out of love.' Love in the fuller sense, what the Greeks called charity, is necessary in every relation of life."

Maud made no reply. Her eyelids quivered a little.

"Love in the sense of charity—is the only solution to the problem of life: we have tried easier methods and they have failed. By love I don't mean sentiment or admiration for what is charming—I mean something that is 'stronger than death.' A man who has the leisure to sit by his fireside surrounded by pictures and books and selected companions will often, after he has had a reasonably good dinner, say, nay protest, that 'love' is better than the Law and the Prophets, and wiser than any Philosophy. So it is, but it is incalculably harder—as he will find out if you turn that man out of his sheltered library, face to face with the coarser forms of Humanity and ask him to show his 'love' to them. Suppose you make him attend to some irritable paralytic, or saddle him with a drunken wife, or make him responsible for underlings who are envious and suspicious and then ask

him whether he finds 'love' as easy as he thought." He paused for a moment and then said almost abruptly, "I don't blame a woman for marrying a man whom she does not love, if she is strong enough and tender enough to behave to him as if she did love him." His mouth relaxed with a smile that would at any other time have been irresistible to Maud, just now she could not smile in return, she felt inexpressibly pained. The tears started to her eyes, the corners of her mouth dropped miserably, and she bent her head. After a moment's silence he added very gravely: "The woman you speak of is marrying—for some *reason*," and he laid a stress on the last word.

"Of course," said Maud, trying to control her emotion. She raised her head, and sat with drooping eyelids like a child being catechised.

"Is the motive of the marriage respect," he asked, "or the desire for a home?"

Maud did not answer.

"Wealth?" he suggested.

She bent her head slightly.

"The man you are about to marry," he began. He laid no emphasis on the "you," the word dropped into its place without effort. "The man you are about to marry has something to offer you that you prize. Very well. Is there anything you can give him in return for this that he will value highly?"

"I don't know," said Maud.

"Does he care about sympathy, affection?"

Maud did not deny it. Everything was

going against her. This man was making her feel that she was morally feeble, and she wanted to be told that she was really strong, only unfortunate.

"And you can't give him sympathy or affection, is that it? You are not strong enough or tender enough to behave as if you loved him?"

Maud shook her head—and allowed a tear to trickle down her cheek and fall upon her muff.

"In that case you mustn't marry him."

Maud rose from her chair.

"I knew you'd say that," she murmured.

He rose from his chair too and stood looking down at her:

"Whatever faults there are on either side, whatever regrets there may be or repinings, a man and a woman must at least start their married life with an honest recognition that they have given 'hostages to fortune.' Do you understand?"

She understood only too well. The interview was over, the judgment had gone against her and she felt that there could be no appeal—that was the hardship of it.

"You don't know how difficult it will be," she said impulsively.

"Life itself is difficult," he said. "It has never been better described than as no more and no less than the brief glance thrown by a drowning man who lifts his head for a moment above the waves around him and stretches out his hands towards sights and sounds, the meaning

of which he has no time to understand, and then sinks and is gone. Realise the solemnity of this and you will not go far wrong. I am speaking to you," he added, "in your own language, not in the language of religion."

Maud moved her lips silently as she gazed up at him.

He looked down intently at her and laid his hand on her shoulder:

"In words that you and I can both understand, let me urge you to look on life as very short and very precious."

"I will try," she said.

Then he moved away from her, bidding her wait for a moment while he fetched his hat from the vestry. Surely she had not been in the church more than five or ten minutes, and in that short time all that had been happening for many, many weeks was cancelled.

She walked slowly down the aisle toward the door. She could hear voices from the vestry, his voice and the voice of the sacristan, she could not hear what they said.

At the door she waited and turned back. He was coming towards her. She pushed open the door and stood outside. The afternoon was already getting dark and the wind was, if possible, colder than it had been before. Maud shivered and drew her furs more closely round her.

"We can get a taxi in the next street," he said. As they walked along together it seemed to Maud as if neither time nor circumstance

had had anything to do with the relationship with this man. He had always intended to answer her question, and she had always intended to ask it. A few paces brought them to a street which her companion turned down. It led to a big thoroughfare and Maud could see in the gathering twilight at the corner a row of taxi-cabs. She could see a motor-omnibus passing crowded with city men, she could see the traffic and rush of London, she could hear the noise loud and fitful.

Before she could collect her thoughts, before she could clearly see her position, before she had time to realise what lay before her, she would be speeding away in one of the taxis, carrying her marching orders with her, orders given her by a stranger, some one who had sprung from nowhere but whom she recognised at once as, of necessity, the arbiter of her fate.

How she rebelled against the consequences of his judgment, rebelled and yet saw no escape from them! Besides, she had said, "I will try." He hailed a taxi, and Maud saw it shunt and then slide towards them lessening the short distance with an almost malignant rapidity.

How would she be able to go through with all that lay before her when she was alone, weak and unsupported by the force of this man's presence? He helped her into the taxi and shut the door upon her.

"What address?" he asked.

Maud gave it, and she could hear him repeat it to the chauffeur.

Then she leaned her head at the window in a sudden haste.

"I don't even know your name," she called, for she felt like a child who has just discovered that he has lost sight of his home and that he is lost.

"Wait a minute," he said to the driver, and feeling in his pockets he produced a leathern card case. He took out a card and handed it in at the window to Maud.

"Good-bye," he said and stood back on the pavement.

Maud sat leaning forward, the card in her hand. She gazed out at the tall cloaked figure. What was his life like? What was the secret of it? What suffering had been his, what joys? She would never see him again. He had come across her for a moment and had gone, and yet the whole future direction of her life had been decided by his judgment; the order of his life, of which she knew nothing, ruled hers.

He was out of sight and she sank back upon the cushions disconsolate.

The card! It was in her hand. She sat up, peered over it, reading it by the dim lamplight. There was the name and address. How strange! It seemed as if she heard a familiar echo of Ursula's voice from the distance.

He was Father Fitzherbert of the Community of St. Paul.

And all the time he had never so much as pronounced the word "God."

CHAPTER XII

Lady Dorothy was very much excited by the events of the afternoon, that is to say, her talk with George Broughton. She was a little indignant that Maud had not stayed at home to meet George. Maud ought not to have gone out —on such an occasion, and if she had gone out, she ought not to have walked so far that she was obliged to rest for half an hour in a church before driving home.

"It's too late for tea—and I don't want any," said Maud.

"You shouldn't wander about like a lost lamb," said Lady Dorothy. "It isn't a proper or a pleasant thing to do—and, of course, you are too tired to want any tea now; but do listen while I tell you. They are to be married in July!"

Lady Dorothy stared hard at her niece, but failed to attract her eyes. "Now, Maud, why can't you and Lionel fix on a date for yourselves? What do you say to being married on the same day as George and Stella?"

Lady Dorothy looked still harder at her niece across the bridge of her nose, a habit she had when she was thinking of "ways and means."

Maud had gone to the fire and was gazing

down at the point of her toe as she placed it on the fender.

Life did seem very short and very precious—for the moment—when Fitzherbert was walking beside her, but now in the commonplace London drawing-room, with Aunt Dorothy talking to her, her own personal hopes and fears came crowding back upon her with sudden intensity, and life seemed very long—and full of sordid necessities.

"What do you think?" demanded her Aunt Dorothy. "Isn't it a good idea?"

"Please don't even suggest such a thing," said Maud, in a tone of cold surprise.

"But we must consider expense," said Lady Dorothy. "Sentiment is all very well, Maud, but both you and Stella must be married from here; and you know—well, my dear, you must know—that since your uncle's death I have had to get along as best I could."

"I know, I know," said Maud. "All I mean, dear Aunt Dorothy, is that Stella's wedding should be considered first—there is no hurry about mine!"

"It ought to be the other way about—a hurry for you—and no hurry for Stella."

"I haven't thought of the day yet," said Maud gloomily, "not even of the month—or" she added in a low voice, "the year. Anyhow, my wedding will cost nothing. Major Kames has no relatives—that I have ever heard of—and as to mine—no one matters but you, Aunt Dorothy. An absolutely quiet wedding is all I could possibly tolerate."

"I wish you were not so eccentric, Maud," said Lady Dorothy; "you must consult Lionel's wishes in the matter. A perfectly quiet wedding is all right when people are in mourning, but it is not a good beginning under ordinary circumstances—it is unsociable and very unsuitable when you are marrying a wealthy man. I don't know how I can afford two separate weddings this summer. I've been going through the matter roughly—very roughly—just now, merely to get an estimate of what it will cost—Ursula can't help—— You see there is a trousseau for each of you."

"Stella is sure to want an orthodox wedding, Aunt Dorothy—so that as things stand now," said Maud coldly, "I have two alternatives before me—either to be married quietly, or not to be married at all. I'm not sure that it wouldn't be better to put off my wedding—indefinitely! What do you think?"

This was not what Lady Dorothy meant. She gasped: "What do you mean?" she demanded.

"Nothing in the world would induce me to go halves in Stella's wedding," said Maud. "An ordinary single wedding seems to me absurd enough, but a double one—dear Aunt Dorothy, do talk of something else."

"How can I talk of something else? Here you and Stella get engaged within a fortnight of each other—and are going to be married—and you expect me not to talk about it. You are not reasonable; we must talk it over with

Lionel, who, I am quite sure will be willing to discuss the most important step in his life—even if you won't —in fact," she added, "he may have decided views."

"He will have to choose between a quiet wedding or no wedding. He may prefer the latter," said Maud.

"Your walk hasn't done you any good," said Lady Dorothy. "Wandering alone about the London streets is not healthy or nice for a girl."

"I'm sorry," said Maud. "Perhaps when I have warmed my feet my brains will work better—until they are warm I can't help thinking that it is pleasant to know that when I die I shan't have to arrange my own funeral."

"Many people *do* arrange their own funeral beforehand," said Lady Dorothy, "and enjoy doing it, though not people of your age."

"Then I am glad to think that nobody can arrange what they are going to do in the next world, Aunt Dorothy," said Maud, hitching up the skirt of her dress slightly and smoothing it out over her knees.

"Of course not," said Lady Dorothy. "A divine Providence has arranged that—or will arrange it—but I am not asking you to discuss the next world with me."

"That's quite true—you have me there," said Maud. "I'm cross and stupid—I can't think just now, Aunt Dorothy."

Lady Dorothy gave an inarticulate grunt and looked her niece all over. Then she looked at the clock.

"Dinner in an hour's time," she said. "I asked Lionel to be here at half-past seven." As she spoke she rose from her chair, and stooping down gathered Kiddie in her arms. "I'm going," she said, adding—"and so the darling, Kidikins, the poor ickle Kidikins, has got to spend his evening all alone-y-one. Oh, the wicked people, oh, the heartless people to leave the angel angel all alone-y-one."

If Lady Dorothy had had the dispensing of the lives of her nieces, she would have ordered a miracle and got Ursula married to some respectable parson, and she would have disposed of Stella, either to George or some one else. Maud she would have retained in her own service. Although she found Maud at times a little exasperating, Maud was her favourite. Maud's engagement might not have been so pleasing to her, had it been to any one less fascinating than Major Kames. Major Kames was just the nephew-in-law that Lady Dorothy would have chosen to have—had her imagination been vivid enough to anticipate his personality.

Lady Dorothy felt as if her entourage had suddenly been enriched, life was more amusing now that Lionel Kames visited No. 2, Brown Street. Lady Dorothy went through the process of dressing with an interest in it that she had not felt for years. The only drawback to the evening's enjoyment was the necessity of leaving Kiddie at home. She was sure that in course of time Kiddie would learn to appreciate Lionel and love him, and the few gathering clouds that

darkened her darling's life would be dispersed in the near future when he would become a welcome guest along with his mistress at Orpenden. Orpenden would be a charming change of air for Kiddie. How keenly he would enjoy the grounds! What a delightful man Lionel was—and so considerate! There he was already in the drawing-room when Lady Dorothy came down. He was not merely punctual to the moment, he was in front of the clock, and had arrived five minutes before the time. He was there, large, prosperous, and genial.

"Maud is late," said Lady Dorothy, as she looked with attentive scrutiny at her future nephew-in-law. Everything about him pleased her; she felt warmed, secure and stimulated by his presence; the misgiving that sometimes crept into her heart in spite of Kiddie, in spite of her self-assertion, the misgiving that she was after all—just an old, lonely woman, had no place even at the back of her thoughts when she was talking to Lionel Kames. Somehow, mysteriously, he shed a rose colour over herself and her drawing-room. Lady Dorothy did not notice any lack of spirituality in him. She did not look for "spirituality." Her brother General Monckton had called himself an "agnostic," Lady Dorothy called herself a "Christian," and neither position had any relation to "spirituality." Lady Dorothy directed her coachman to drive to church in exactly the same spirit as she would have directed him to Bond Street for shops or to Buxton for baths.

"Lionel," she said, "another family event! My nephew George, whom you saw yesterday, is just engaged to Stella. There, isn't that a piece of news?"

Kames's face looked down at her attentively. "Lucky beggar," he said, after a brief pause—and his face looked enigmatic.

"So's she," said Lady Dorothy.

"Of course," said Kames, "so's she!" His face still looked enigmatic.

"There's no doubt that Stella is a very fine girl," said Lady Dorothy, "though very different to Maud."

"You cannot compare them," said Kames, still occupied with his own thoughts.

"No, you can't compare them—they are both splendid girls. And—" added Lady Dorothy, in a perfunctory voice, the voice of one who is saying what is proper about the family, "and Ursula is, as everybody knows, a saint."

Kames raised his head a little.

"It 'd be a dull world without saints," he said, and laughed.

"Oh, do you think so?" said Lady Dorothy, a little sharply, for she was thinking of Ursula.

"I do," said Kames. "They're so surprisin'. Sinners you can haul in by the dozen with a penny hook and a bit of coloured thread, but saints, there's no knowing how to catch 'em, or how to keep 'em when they are caught."

"I don't want to catch them," said Lady

Dorothy. Kames stared down at her narrowly and the corners of his mouth relaxed into a slow smile. She was half nettled, half fascinated by his look. He was perhaps just a little—well, not quite right from the point of view of his antecedents, but apart from that he was charming, he had a personality that pleased her and made her forget she was old. She almost jumped when the drawing-room door opened and Maud came in.

"Maud!" she called, "you are five whole minutes late; it's unpardonable. I only forgive you because I have been telling Lionel about Stella's engagement."

Maud's face, which was pale when she entered, flushed. "I am very sorry, Aunt Dorothy," she said, and then she held out her hand to Kames and smiled, but she did not look at him.

"I should hope you are sorry," said Lady Dorothy. "Lionel, give me your arm."

"I am your obedient servant," said Kames. He had dropped Maud's hand, but his eyes were still on her when he offered his arm to Lady Dorothy.

"Maud isn't generally guilty of bad manners," Lady Dorothy explained.

"I'm sure of it," said Kames.

"Though young people nowadays usually have no manners."

"Bad form," said Kames; "isn't what it used to be. It used to be anything inelegant, now it's t'other way round."

"'Change and decay in all around I see,'"

quoted Lady Dorothy. "So I suppose we must endure it."

Lady Dorothy had arranged that Kiddie should be brought into the dining-room after they were seated at table. She hoped that if he was brought in swiftly and deposited on his own mat in front of his own dinner, he might forgive or overlook the presence of Major Kames. Then, after the warmth of food had permeated his being he would insensibly become accustomed to the intrusion and resent it less.

This optimistic view did not prove to be a correct one. Although Kiddie was brought swiftly in and put down by the plate of food by the fire, he perceived instantly that there was an obnoxious and unaccustomed presence at the sacred and exclusive table of his mistress. He glanced at Major Kames out of the corners of his eyes and fell into a paroxysm of rage, standing stiffly before his still more sacred and exclusive plate. He glared haughtily at the minced chicken and early spinach, and dared Major Kames to come and touch it; he dared Major Kames to remain seated, dared Major Kames to speak, he dared him even to breathe.

"Conversation is impossible," said Maud, glancing everywhere but at Kames. What sort of language was he using under his breath? She had a faint conception of it.

Suddenly Kiddie relaxed his limbs, became silent and fell upon his food.

"The darling!" murmured Lady Dorothy. "Isn't he wonderful with Lionel, Maud? You

will be the best of friends in no time, and once a friend always a friend—with Kiddie. Don't you think fidelity is the greatest of all virtues? You know the Monckton motto—'Faithful to the death.' Whatever vices we may have, we are true to our word. It's Kiddie's motto too."

Maud still avoided the brown watchful eyes of the man who sat opposite her.

Fitzherbert's words, "If you are strong enough and tender enough," wounded her to the very soul. For Maud knew she could be neither strong nor tender; if, ah, if Lionel had been a man like Fitzherbert or like George Broughton, she could—she thought she could—have been both tender and strong.

If she had felt distress at the contrast between George Broughton and Lionel, she felt still more distress at the contrast between Lionel and Fitzherbert.

Once during that dinner she shot a swift look at the man to whom she—a Monckton—had pledged her word. Could she by a superhuman effort pretend to love him? Would it be possible? Kames, still watchful, caught that look and tried by sheer force of will to retain it. She wrenched herself away and sat confused and miserable.

All that evening passed like an uneasy dream. The theatre with its thronged galleries, its hot and oppressive atmosphere, the crowded faces; Lady Dorothy, talkative and amused; the play itself strangely meaningless and unnecessary, the characters shadows with human shape.

Nothing was to Maud distinct and real but the silent struggle between Lionel and herself. It had come to that—he knew it and was gathering up his forces for the attack. A man came into the box and began talking. It was that youthful "cheeper" of music-hall phrases, whom Stella called "Jumper." Maud could see that he was attracted by Kames. Kames stood conspicuous, a notable figure. He looked like a man who controlled the circumstances of life, he suggested "money," and young Broughton was impressed. Maud could hear the youth criticising the drama. Maud could hear Lionel's voice.

"What do you mean by realism?" she heard him demand.

The youth's reply was that he meant what everybody else meant.

"Everybody don't mean the same," said Kames's voice rapidly; in his tone there was a suppressed irritation that was new to Maud.

"Who are you trying to identify?" asked Lady Dorothy, bending her high bridged nose nearer to Maud.

"I'm only looking at the confusion," said Maud, for her ears were straining to catch the voices behind her that had withdrawn themselves a little.

"A great man," she heard Kames say in a lowered voice to escape the ears of Lady Dorothy, "a great man may mean by realism what he sees, or thinks he sees, in the gutter or in the church or on the hill-top but——" and here

Maud only just caught the last words, "but knowing human nature as I do, when I hear a lousy-looking brute, who smells of the paint box or of the lamp, slobbering praise of realism, I know, even though he don't know himself, that what he means is: real uninterrupted dirt; the cant name for it is: 'Art for Art's sake.'"

Maud shuddered and found herself repeating almost as one repeats the words of some old prayer barely remembered, "I want you to think of life as very short and very precious." Oh, what did it all mean, this conflict, this struggle, this grasping at things that are here, there and are gone, this sounding swift tumultuous coming and going of human life?

The play was all over, the curtain was being lowered for the last time and the audience were pressing to the doors. Maud found herself out in the fresh air among a pushing crowd; then came the swift gliding along midnight streets and they were home again. Now, what was going to happen? Most mercifully, most amazingly Kames refused to come in. He stood just inside the hall, hat in hand, saying Good night.

"So you really won't, really positively," said Lady Dorothy, trying to conceal her relief, for was not her own Kiddie waiting for her upstairs? She could hear the distant sound of his darling screams, and dear, dear Lionel might excite the angel too, too much for his little nerv-y-nerves.

Maud had slipped past her Aunt Dorothy

and stood, looking white and guilty, out of Lionel's reach. She had not yet said Good night.

"Maud!" said Lady Dorothy. "He absolutely refuses to come in," and she moved towards the staircase. Kames was still standing at the door.

"Maud," he said, bluntly. "Wait! I want to ask you a question."

"Of course, of course," called out Lady Dorothy clutching at her cloak and impedimenta and beginning to mount the stairs. "Good-bye, Lionel, such a delightful evening, indeed, most delightful," she called back, as she ran nimbly up, nimbly for her age, but then she was stimulated to extra exertion by the thought that the "young couple" wanted her out of the way.

Jackson had disappeared and Maud stood there, her face getting more and more strained.

What was the question Lionel was going to ask her? Was it the date of their marriage? If so she would be forced to speak out.

"Don't look so startled," said Kames.

"Do I look startled?" said Maud.

"You know that you look startled and are startled," he said. Standing there in the full glare of the light he looked as if he was about to add some abrupt exclamation, but he suppressed himself and said after a moment's pause—

"I've promised Lady Dorothy to come to her At Home to-morrow and sing—do you wish me to come?"

"I thought you said you'd promised," said Maud, trembling a little.

"I have promised!"

There was a long pause which became intolerable to Maud.

"You will find it appallingly dull," she said. "Old pals of Aunt Dorothy, people who endure Kiddie. You will suffer a martyrdom."

But she saw that the party was not what he was thinking of, he scarcely followed the words she was saying. He made a step towards her and moved his lips.

"I want to apologise," he said, "for a remark that I made to you yesterday—outside the drawing-room—a remark about Broughton. Will you try and forgive me?"

Forgive him, when all the time she was needing forgiveness herself—for her weakness and her lack of honour towards a man who after all had done her no injury. Even if he was inferior to George Broughton, to Fitzherbert, she had no right to treat him with duplicity.

"It is I who need forgiveness," said Maud, without moving. He glanced at her swiftly and searchingly.

"That may or may not be, but it is easier for me to forgive you. In this short time I have learned to forgive you even for giving me great pain. I cannot conceive myself refusing you forgiveness for anything except——," here he paused as if unable to pronounce the words.

Maud knew what he meant except—failure to keep her promise!

In proportion as his passion had grown, his pride had fallen. It had come to this, that her lack of sympathy, her unflattering criticism of him, counted to him as nothing. That was folly. In that case did he really deserve so much consideration from her?

This thought plunged her into a revulsion of self-pity. Had he not given her a sort of right to keep him and yet to be unkind to him if she liked? Oh, no, no, that was a dishonourable thought. And yet——

"You could forgive anything," she said, not daring to meet his eyes but speaking low and looking on the floor, for she was ignoring his real meaning. "You could forgive anything except—finding me religious or mystical—that would be to you—unforgivably absurd and repellant?"

"By God!" he burst out. "It would not. I make no pretence to religion myself—I wouldn't lie to you on such a matter, but you are free to think what you like."

"Thanks," said Maud.

"I love you so much," said Kames, in a low voice, "that it seems to me—standing here and looking at you as I do now—that there are no thoughts of yours that could be repulsive to me—no thoughts, true or false, that I could not tolerate, or even express myself at your command!"

He was making it more and more difficult for her to retrace her steps. Underneath this seeming humility lurked the tyranny of a despot.

His love was like a serpent. He meant to wind himself round her soul till he suffocated it.

"Why do you think you can change your nature?" she asked, with raised eyebrows of incredulity.

"You don't know all that my nature is," he said, "nor do you fully know yours. There are moments when I am tempted to think that did we really know ourselves we should die with laughing—or go mad."

Maud's cheeks from turning pale turned red and her pulses beat. There was something in this man that frightened her, repelled her, attracted her. She said to herself over and over again that his personality was too strong for her, that face to face with him she was not her true self—and this half truth, half falsehood, she iterated to herself fiercely as a verbal justification of her weakness.

"Don't keep me, let me go please," she said, pulling her hand from his. "Forgive me, good night," and she ran away from him to the stairs. She ran up them not daring to look back. He did not call her, the hall was silent behind her.

How much longer was she to go on torturing herself, and him?

She heard the hall-door close as she reached the landing. She stood, her hand on her beating heart, listening. She thought she could hear him call out something to his chauffeur and then the car whizzed away down the wet, slushy street. Mysticism! the spiritual life! What right had she to speak of them, mere words that

a parrot could repeat if it had heard Father Fitzherbert use them?

Mysticism! Why, the curse of her whole life was that the world we see and touch and the love of that world was her dominant passion.

"Here's a letter for you," said Lady Dorothy, who was sipping a cup of cocoa with Kiddie on her knees.

Maud took it and opened it. It was from Ursula. It was all about Stella's engagement, a letter full of sympathy and sisterly affection. House-hunting was, of course, at an end and the Brighton lodgings were taken on till the end of July. Ursula said nothing about what would happen to herself after that!

Maud looked up from the letter and sat thinking. Would Aunt Dorothy be inconsolable when the time came to tell her that Lionel must cease to come to No. 2, Brown Street—that the engagement was broken off—would she be inconsolable, or would she be much annoyed, or would she be a little contemptuous?

"Anyhow, Ursula will be happy—at last!" said Maud, bitterly to herself. "Poor, poor Ursula!"

"My plan——" called out Lady Dorothy, "my plan to-morrow is to send out Kiddie for a walk in the morning and then he will not mind so much being imprisoned all the afternoon in my room. I wish I could have him in the drawing-room, but I think it would scarcely do—it will be Lionel's first Sunday afternoon in this house and he's going to sing for me. People

who perform, however charming they are, seem so extraordinarily sensitive about any *other* noise going on at the same time in the room—and I would not for the world annoy that good-natured man. Another Sunday, and Kiddie and he will be firm friends and then—we shall see—what we shall see!"

Kiddie gazed out into the room from his mistress's lap and appeared to listen and understand though he made no response.

"I have never come across any one more obliging than Lionel Kames," continued Lady Dorothy. "He will make an ideal husband and he admires you so much that he will allow himself to be ruled by you, lucky girl!"

Maud looked away from her aunt towards the fire.

"A man is only ruled by his wife if she is selfish, or silly, or a little coarse; then he allows her to tread upon him and is faithful. Women are just the same. If a woman marries a really good man, she is fretful and discontented, full of extremes and silly ambitions of her own—if he's a brute she spends her life looking after him, considering him, loving him, praying for him!"

"Maud!" said Lady Dorothy, "you haven't yet got over your quite unnecessary and very strange walk this afternoon."

"I can't help what I see around me, Aunt Dorothy," said Maud. "I didn't invent human nature, I only observe it."

"Then you observe it wrongly, my dear,"

said Lady Dorothy. "Now I've got something to tell you that will cheer you up—Lionel is giving a dinner the week after next at Orpenden, for us to meet some of his friends in the neighbourhood. He has asked me to act as hostess, and to-morrow he will consult you and me as to the day that will suit us best. I shall wear the Monckton collarette, the only bit of respectability we have left to us. I must get it out of the bank."

CHAPTER XIII

All that restless night Maud dreamed of the dimly lit chapel in which she had met and had talked with Fitzherbert. Now in her dreams their conversation was constantly interrupted by unaccountable intrusions of her Aunt Dorothy, who came into that sacred place with Kiddie on her arm, announcing startling news of Lionel Kames, either that he was dead, that he had suddenly married, or that he himself wished the engagement broken off. When Maud woke to the usual Sunday morning in Brown Street, she found the grey daylight waiting for her, suggesting the duller and more sordid side of life, the weariness of poverty, of loneliness. If it had seemed hard last night, when her nerves were still tingling with her interview with Fitzherbert, to take the straight and honourable course and break off the engagement, it seemed still harder now—when that interview lay back in the memories of a "yesterday." Lady Dorothy was fussing about Kiddie, fussing about going to church, fussing about the party; she put half a sovereign instead of sixpence into the bag at church, which did not contribute to the calm of her mind.

Maud decided to say nothing until the party was over. After that she must speak!

Until the first comers arrived that afternoon Maud had not perfectly realised that this party was really meant by her Aunt Dorothy as a sort of seal on the engagement. The truth came upon her with unpleasant emphasis.

The news of Maud's approaching marriage to a wealthy man brought people who generally refused Lady Dorothy's invitations, when excuse was possible, and the drawing-room of No. 2, Brown Street, was crowded as it had not been for many a year. Maud found herself the centre of a buzz of complimentary talk, of questions regarding her future, about Orpenden, about "when it was to come off," and Lady Dorothy was moving about the room full of undisguised satisfaction, receiving congratulations. Maud had put off the "crisis" till after the party, and now the party itself would make the crisis seem not merely an unfortunate circumstance but a scandal. Here Maud was in a false position, and no one else was to blame for her suffering but herself. She ought to have spoken out long ago. Now it was getting to be "too late." The heat of the room soon became oppressive. Lady Dorothy had the old-fashioned belief that, although plenty of fresh air was theoretically (as held by men of science) necessary for the human organism, as a matter of fact and to the knowledge of every plain sensible man (whose reason has not been undermined by learning) fresh air should be indulged in sparingly.

All the windows in the drawing-room were shut, but "more than enough" fresh air was

obtained through the open door into Lady Dorothy's writing-room.

Maud dared not ask to have a window opened, though her head ached. She was filled with a strange kind of pleasurable agony of self-contempt at being evidently considered a "successful person." It was a new kind of experience; it would not last long, but while it lasted it was like drinking a cup of nectar at the bottom of which lurked a corrosive poison.

People were actually talking to her about the beauties of Orpenden. Somebody even knew that there was a famous rose-garden at Orpenden —and she was drawn deeper and deeper into a net which she had spread with her own hands. She had never heard of Orpenden till she met Lionel! She never ought to have entered its gates as its future mistress. Now, Orpenden was tied round her neck. She was credited with it—she could neither endure life in it nor without it. That was the horrible dilemma!

Maud glanced nervously round her. Had Lionel arrived yet? Was he within hearing of all this about Orpenden? He had only just entered the room. There he was at the door, and his conspicuous figure was greeted by a lull of voices. Then the clamour became all the greater. Maud became almost fiercely calm. It was destiny that had forced her into this engagement, it was forcing her into marriage; had she not better drift down with the stream and let it take her whither it would? Perhaps, convinced that it was her destiny, she might

even learn to pretend to love him. Was she strong enough? Could she make herself strong enough? She would need to be very strong!

Somebody sang a song about lovers being parted for no specified reason, the sort of song that Lady Dorothy thought decorous on Sunday. Maud's eyes drifted round again to where Kames was standing. He had got as far as the centre of the room and was being introduced to people by Lady Dorothy in a voice laden with self-satisfaction. Kames watchfully caught her glance, and his eyes said: "You have not yet spoken to me." He looked as if he was about to break away from Lady Dorothy and Maud shook her head slightly at him, but her lips smiled.

It was only the briefest recognition of him, the faintest sign of sympathy, and she was startled to see the effect it had on him. The contrast between Lionel on that first afternoon of their engagement when they lunched together at Eastbourne, and Lionel this afternoon here at No. 2, Brown Street, was very great. Was she not wronging him outrageously? What right had she to allow herself to become a necessity to him, and then to say "No"? She had no right.

When the crowd had gone and the excitement was over, would not this brief momentary mood of toleration of him pass away, and would she not, pledged bride as she was, repulse him as before? Would not her old instinct be too

strong for her? She would wait and see. She might try being strong.

The afternoon was slipping slowly away and Lionel had not played or sung. Lady Dorothy had asked one of her youthful friends for a Sonata by Beethoven or some other classical composer, because she considered the determined and persevering exposition of permutations and combinations in sound the best background to conversation and a stimulus to perfectly irrelevant thought. The young lady to whom the request was made either being unable, or unwilling, to perform the task, played instead the newest drawing-room composition of the newest French composer. This composition resembled as nearly as possible the usual efforts of a piano-tuner to tune the piano, and for some reason unexplained to Lady Dorothy *that* reminded her suddenly that though she had been busy telling everybody that Major Kames was not merely a rider to hounds but an accomplished musician, her guests had not yet had the opportunity of judging for themselves, and the afternoon was wearing swiftly to a close. It really felt a little warm in the drawing-room and Lady Dorothy opened the door into the writing-room wider, and pulled the heavy carved screen that concealed the room and its contents a trifle on one side.

"There," she said, "more air."

Kames was at her side at that moment, ready to help her.

"Shall I open a window?" he asked. Lady

Dorothy pretended not to hear such an outrageous suggestion.

"I almost thought I heard his voice," she said, as she turned back to the drawing-room again.

"The Kid's voice?" inquired Kames.

"Yes, the angel's," said Lady Dorothy. "It has been such a long afternoon for him."

"He can't read a paper and smoke to while away the time," said Kames.

"How true!" exclaimed Lady Dorothy. "You are such a clever man. Now that never occurred to me before, though I am so devoted to him. You must understand as few people do that if you keep a dog it ought to be a point of honour to treat the poor, dumb, helpless animal justly, otherwise it isn't what you people call 'playing the game.' By the bye, it's getting late and you haven't sung yet—I expect people are staying on to hear you; I've told everybody what a musician you are."

Lady Dorothy looked tired—for years she had not had so much excitement.

"You have told them!" exclaimed Kames. "Well, one good turn deserves another. Do you want to get rid of the crowd and hurry upstairs to the lonely orphan? Because if you do, I'll clear 'em out like the very devil and bring the proceedings to a close."

"My dear Lionel," she said, laughing, "what do you mean?"

He really was the most unusual and most helpful man she had ever known; the afternoon

was getting a little fatiguing, though it had been so successful. Kames, however, did not answer her question. He had disappeared.

Maud was standing by the piano talking to two or three young married women of her own age. One of them was saying to her—

"Aren't you charmed with Orpenden?" Always, always Orpenden!

Maud was leaning one hand upon the piano, feeling almost faint with the heat and yet dreading the moment when the crowd should go and leave her face to face with Kames—alone.

"Lady Dorothy commands me to sing," said Kames, suddenly touching Maud's shoulder, and bending down, he added in a voice that no one but herself could hear:

"I am going to sing something for your special benefit, nobody else will know what the deuce it's all about."

A song for her special benefit? Maud moved away as swiftly as she could. Was he going to sing her a love-song in this public place, among this crowd of people good-naturedly attracted hither by the pleasant rumour of money, of prosperity?

No, not that; they could understand a love-song as well as she could, unless indeed it was something very subtle.

What did he mean? Was he drawing her still deeper into the bonds that bound her to him? Was he making it more and more impossible for her to release herself?

Sheer nervousness made her shrink away

without looking at him and without glancing at any one. The nearest door was the open one into the writing-room. She must escape. She could not bear to hear that song, sung especially for her. It had been agony to hear that song of Grieg's at Orpenden. This might be worse. She did not want to listen to his secret thoughts; such thoughts could only be weapons with which to wound her, frighten her; and she slipped past the open door, past the heavy carved screen, and stood in the writing-room, breathing as if she had run, trying not to hear the sounds from the drawing-room. Should she escape still farther and go out to the landing? The drawing-room door was already wide open on to the landing and there were probably some people standing there. She was in a trap, but she was safer here. Ah, here was the dreaded sound coming. Chords on the piano were struck very forcibly; then they got fainter as if the player was gradually moving away from the crowd and receding into the distance. Maud could feel the hair stir upon her head, as if the presence of some supernatural being was announced. The noise of talking suddenly ceased, and from that distance whence the singer seemed to have removed himself came his voice, the voice she dreaded. But how different from the voice with which he had sung in the drawing-room at Orpenden! Human passion had died out of it and he seemed like a man wrapt in a profound reverie, struggling with some mystical obscure thought. The words were unknown to her:

"I knew not where I entered,
For when I stood within,
Not knowing where I stood,
I heard great things.
What I have heard I dare not tell!
I was there as one who knew nought,
All human thought transcending."

When his voice ceased Maud held her breath, waited and hoped that it would come again. The same chords were repeated but in a higher key, and the voice came again:

"I stood enraptured
In ecstasy, beside myself,
And in my every sense
No sense remained.
My spirit was endowed
With understanding, understanding nought,
All human thought transcending."[1]

Maud held her breath and waited and hoped again, but the song was finished and the last notes of the piano died away. It was cruelly short, and already the sensation of the common world was rushing upon her again. She could hear the loud, jarring, discordant, confused noise of people strongly desirous to get away, a hubbub of good-byes, no doubt graced by the brief complimentary phrases that are useful to people who are afraid of being bored a second time; she could hear hurried steps on the landing, down the stairs. Maud could hear her own name called out as if she was being sought and yet she did not move. A sudden rush of cold air swept under the door to her. She could hear the subdued snorting of motors; once she

thought she could distinguish Lionel's voice and her Aunt Dorothy's she could hear plainly, and yet she did not move.

As she stood staring helplessly before her, something gradually entered her consciousness. The room was empty and yet she was not alone! She was really looking at something—at some one. A human form was between her and the screen. She could see it plainly in the flickering light of the fire! Who was it?

She knew the gaunt figure in a flash! She recognised it! He was standing in front of the screen with his back towards her. His arms were clasped behind him, and she saw the thinness of his wrists; his head was bent, his iron-grey hair was conspicuous. How amazing! He was there in flesh and blood, and yet his presence was impossible. "Father Fitzherbert," she called very softly, afraid of her own voice, afraid of calling upon some one who she knew could not be there although he was there.

As his name left her lips the form became less distinct, and her startled eyes were aware that the head had disappeared, the iron-grey hair; then the hands, so definite a moment ago, melted away, and in their place were the large ivory chrysanthemums in a panel of the screen. A fragment of the cassock was still visible. She stretched her hands out into empty air, the cassock vanished and she was absolutely alone.

Had that strange song which enthralled her —which was meant to enthral her—been challenged by the occult world? Was that phantom

of Fitzherbert projected into space as a protest from the real spiritual world against the artifice of genius? Or was that vision the work of her own subconscious memory asserting itself—her truer self reminding her frailer self of human faith and human duty, of honour that she was always forgetting, of the urgent moral necessity either to send this man away, or to take him now and for always as her friend and lover?

Maud shuddered. A sound came to her of the front-door banging, a gust of wind blew in from the staircase and made the fire flicker with a sudden blaze. She could hear footsteps hurrying from below upstairs, past the door and then again upstairs; then came silence.

Her cheeks were cold now; she felt an icy chill in all her veins.

Some one was coming into the room from the drawing-room. It was Kames; he pushed past the screen and stood before her.

"Maud!" he said.

She did not move.

He stood there, a man shorn of all his old self-possession, his satisfaction with the world, his humour, his buoyancy. An unbearable emotion, a piercing ache that caught him below the heart was wringing out of him all the garnered self-complacency of a pampered manhood. He stood there silent, protesting with his eyes; no phrases came to his lips. He held out his arms to her, but she did not move. At last he came forward with a rapid step and caught her to him.

"Maud, try to love me," he said. He lifted

her arms to his neck, but they fell limply from his shoulders and fell at her side. Not all the fire of his own passion could rouse in her any response.

She strained her face away from him.

"It is hopeless," she said. "Every way it is hopeless!"

He took her face in his hands.

"Love me," he said.

"I can't—Lionel—I can't!"

The words that ought to have been uttered long ago were uttered at last and they could never be withdrawn.

A piercing sound, a dog's bark, seemed to strike at them from the door behind them; some one was coming in. Dizzy as Maud was, she realised in a flash that her Aunt Dorothy was there, standing, amazed, stricken at the scene.

Maud released herself from Kames's arms.

"It's—all—over—between—us," she said, stammering; "it's—all—over," and she made her way blindly past Lady Dorothy and went out at the door.

Lady Dorothy stood just as she had entered the room by the door with Kiddie in her arms, staring with blank consternation.

"Lionel!" she cried. "You won't allow this!"

Then she turned on the lights, as if that would dispel the nightmare. But there was Kames, his head bent, his features contracted, silent, like a pugilist who has been dealt a blow from which he cannot recover.

"Lionel!" cried Lady Dorothy. "This is nonsense, is it not?—this is a silly fad of Maud's, nothing more? She's quarrelled with you."

Kames raised his head.

"From the very first she never cared for me. I tried to overcome that and I failed. Don't blame her, nor me."

"I do blame her," cried Lady Dorothy, "for allowing——"

"Don't blame her," said Kames drearily. "I don't blame her, and God knows it's I who have lost everything. It's off and there's no going back." He pulled himself together and walked up to Lady Dorothy.

"Surely——" she began.

"No! There's no going back. I've had my sentence. Thanks for all your kindness, and good-bye!" He bent over her hand, and before she could recover herself he had passed her and had gone out and down the stairs. She clutched at Kiddie, pressing him against her; he too seemed cowed and quiescent.

"Oh, what a wretched piece of work!" moaned the old lady. Then she went to the easy-chair and sinking into it burst into tears. "No more Major Kames! Oh, Maud, Maud, what a wicked—what a fool you are!" groaned Lady Dorothy.

CHAPTER XIV

More than four months had passed away—slowly enough. All that spring was to Maud nothing now but a sinister memory—the memory of her illness in their lodgings at Brighton—an illness lasting some weeks, through which Ursula had watched over her with inexhaustible patience, never once alluding to the cause of that illness, never mentioning the past nor suggesting a plan for the future.

At last summer had come in all its first freshness, and Maud felt well again. The early summer deepened into full heat and blossom, and the great white stretch of houses along the sea-front at Brighton became dazzling like an Oriental city under the glare of a July sun. The pavement stung their feet, the heat palpitated visibly on the beach as if the particles of air had become liquid. Stella was away. London was the only place in the world to Stella. George Broughton was there and Aunt Dorothy was eager to distract her mind from the pain and embarrassment of the Kames affair by having Stella with her and quarrelling with her over the preparation of the little flat that was to be the future home of the young couple. It was a comforting reflection to Lady Dorothy that at least one of the two weddings was actually going

to take place. Maud's would have been far more interesting—but there—it was no use scolding Maud; it was better to let Ursula nurse her while she tried to make the best of Stella (such as she was).

As soon as Maud had recovered her nervous strength, she and Ursula had set to work at making Stella's trousseau. It was to be their joint wedding present to her. To Ursula it was a labour of love and duty; to Maud it was a self-imposed penance, a task of bitter sweetness to which she felt herself justly condemned, a task of proper humility from which she tried hard to purge all self-pity.

In all their desultory talks together in the long lovely summer evenings over their work, the two sisters still refrained from speaking to each other of what touched them to the quick, Lionel Kames, and—what they were to do—where they were to go—after Stella's wedding was over? The lodgings ceased to be theirs after July 29—that had been arranged long ago, and they were already let to strangers.

Often and often as she bent over her stitching, Ursula would glance furtively at Maud and wonder if she dared ask that question, "What shall we do? Where shall we go?" Maud seemed more self-controlled, more uniformly cheerful than she had been before, but she had become remote and unapproachable. Her behaviour was affectionate, considerate, even at times tender, but she had clothed herself in an impenetrable reserve and forbade any intrusion.

Ursula sighed, for she knew behind that impenetrable silence lay wounded pride and acute disappointment.

Many a day had Maud lingered by the railings of the Parade, looking over at the summer sea, recalling that afternoon in February—so eventful at the time—and the strangeness of that sunset. The impulse had come upon her now and again to write to Fitzherbert and tell him that she had done what she believed to be right, and that "the earth had grown grey" in the light of that duty. The impulse to write had been strong, but it had always been overcome by a feeling of pride. By this time he might even have forgotten who she was. Fancy looking for an intimate sympathy and having to explain who you were!

On July 22 Stella was to be married. The time was almost at hand, and Maud was bracing herself up to go through the ordeal. When that ordeal was over they had to pack their own possessions, and after a brief holiday away somewhere—it didn't matter where—the question must be settled, where to live—the silence must be broken. Maud did not know which would give her the most intolerable pain, seeing her Aunt Dorothy again after all that had passed, seeing George Broughton again, seeing Stella's future home, or meeting at the wedding Broughton's relatives and many of the very people who had congratulated her on her future possession of Orpenden.

Endure all this she must, and she must endure it without letting any one see that it hurt her.

After all, she was only suffering for her own folly. No injustice had been done to her—it was she who was to blame! No one had been false to her—no one had made her distrust human nature. It was herself she distrusted.

On July 20 Ursula and Maud went up to town, taking with them their present to Stella—Stella's trousseau.

No. 2, Brown Street, was full to overflowing with Stella's purchases, Stella's presents and Stella's happiness. Lady Dorothy got a sort of grim pleasure out of it all, mingled with exasperation at Stella's lack of sense. The bustle and the talk distracted her from memories of the wedding that ought to have been and of Major Kames. When the two sisters arrived at Brown Street the meeting was full of embarrassment on both sides—Stella alone was too buoyantly happy to care. Stella had more than once communicated to George the idea that Maud had fortunately discovered for herself what she, Stella, had known all along and had acted on—that is, that Major Kames was not quite suitable to be the husband of a Monckton. Maud looked very much as she had looked six months ago, only that her step was a little weary sometimes. She kept her face under perfect control and smiled quite as much as was necessary for the occasion. Stella was bubbling over with projects. She was going to have a model home, she was going to plunge into wild success in the musical world, and she was going to back up dear George and dear George's ambitions. She was

going to help him. She was going to stalk into his laboratory, look round her, and get a sort of swift comprehensive bird's eye view of biological science. Then she could aid him with suggestions, with flashes of feminine insight. Hitherto there hadn't been time because of all the shopping.

And what about George? Maud searched his face for his thoughts. He, too, was radiant and no less confident than Stella. He knew that he would be able to work as he had never worked before; he was as gay as a schoolboy on a holiday.

"It's a merciful thing that Stella had me at her back," grumbled Lady Dorothy, "or I don't know what intolerable rubbish she would have bought."

This sent Broughton into fits of delighted laughter, and made the future husband and wife glance at each other with a secret understanding and a generous forgiveness for the old lady. How gay the world was!—how brilliant Stella's cheeks!

On the day of the wedding, even with Ursula's and Maud's help, Stella managed to mislay everything she could mislay. George had given her pearl earrings and these could not be found when it was time to dress. After a frantic search had been made, they were found under her dressing-table, and then the turquoise earrings disappeared, the earrings in which Stella had lived and moved and had her being for so long.

The wonder was that the bride ever reached the church. But she came at last; and even Maud, looking at her, doubted if she had ever

seen a handsomer girl. Broughton was full of reverent attention.

Alas! Kiddie was not present at the ceremony. He had been decorated with a white bow by the bride's own hands, and then he was left behind shrieking in the drawing-room at a window. It was, indeed, his face that they saw first on their return from church when the ceremony was over and Stella was Mrs. George Broughton.

How hot London was! and how hot the rooms at No. 2, Brown Street!

"Think of us," said Broughton gaily, "crossing the Channel at five o'clock and getting a breath of fresh air!" He was giving a last shake of the hand to Ursula as he spoke.

They were all gathering in the hall to see the last of Stella and her husband.

"I say, Aunt Dorothy," added Broughton "shall we take Kiddie with us? I'll promise to be kind to him."

"I couldn't let the cruel man have him," said Lady Dorothy, "but he shall wave a little paw to you as you go off."

So the bride and bridegroom went down the front steps, and Maud, flushed with fatigue and with a great yearning void at her heart, stood at the doorway with Ursula and her aunt. Broughton got into the motor-brougham, the door was banged to; then came a waving of hands and the whirr of the motor.

The buzz caused by the crowd that always gathers at the door of a wedding and the traffic of the streets was pierced by Kiddie's farewell

screams. His struggles were so frantic that Lady Dorothy let him slip to the ground so that she could be free to wave her hand. The car moved, the obstinate crowd were pushed aside by a policeman, but for a moment the car backed to get a clear path, then it swerved and then jerked forward again, and as it did so a sound struck on Maud's ears. She turned swiftly and looked at Lady Dorothy.

"They are gone," said Lady Dorothy and she sighed—for one brief moment she had even forgotten Kiddie. She turned back into the hall and sighed again, for there is something profoundly sad as well as profoundly joyful in the breaking off of an old life to begin a new life. Why there should be this dual emotion in her heart Lady Dorothy did not know, but there it was!

"Ursula," whispered Maud, laying a sudden hand on her sister's arm, "something has happened to Kiddie. Take Aunt Dorothy upstairs; don't let her know anything till the people have gone."

Out from the moving crowd, up the steps, Maud saw Jackson coming towards her, his face white. He had something in his arms.

"The dog's dead, Miss," he said. "The ribbon must have been loose, and when the car backed, caught it and pulled him under. What's to be done with her ladyship, I don't know."

Kiddie lay in his arms, limp and lifeless, the wedding favour was pulled out into a crushed and dirty string. That minute personality, with all its vices and its virtues had ceased to be.

CHAPTER XV

If Jackson had been asked any day these last eight years whether he would rejoice at Kiddie's decease, he would have replied in the affirmative. Not only the dog, but the dog's shop where the dog was measured for his coats, was loathed by Jackson with a loathing that he was never able to express in adequate words. But now on this fateful day in July when Kiddie lay in his arms for the last time, motionless and noiseless, the accumulated wrath of years vanished from Jackson's mind and left him occupied with suitable arrangements for Kiddie's interment to the exclusion of other thought.

Her ladyship was prostrate. Miss Monckton and Miss Maud had as much as they could do to look after her, and to Jackson fell the duty of writing to the dog's shop to order a box lined with white satin, in which Kiddie's remains could be reverently buried in the little square of garden behind the house whence Kiddie used to chase the cats in the days agone. Jackson had just written the letter, and Mrs. Jackson, who had kept house for many a long year, flushed with the complicated events of the day was leaning over his shoulder looking at it.

"'Ow you can sign yourself 'yours truly'

to a shop which always annoys you, is more than I can believe," she remarked.

Jackson folded the letter into the envelope. He meant to go out and post it to catch the midnight post. There were fully five minutes to spare.

"As far as this 'ere flowery business is concerned, I h'am 'yours truly,' and very much so," he said, as he took out his watch.

"She may get a worse dog," suggested Mrs. Jackson.

"There ain't no worse ones," said Jackson; "he was the limit. But he don't exist now."

"'Ow do you know that, Jackson?" said Mrs. Jackson, moving away from her spouse.

It was this doubt suggested by Mrs. Jackson in the secrecy of the "room," that tormented Lady Dorothy upstairs in her bedroom, as she lay in bed sleepless. Her face, built to express self-esteem and propriety, looked strangely altered in its abandonment of woe. Even the pink ribbons that tied back her grey hair were limp and twisted. She blinked wretchedly at the couch where Kiddie's little basket was reverently placed and covered with a white cloth.

"Yes," she said, in answer to some soothing talk from Ursula, "but no one can understand but I." She glanced round the room fretfully for Maud.

Into Lady Dorothy's stricken heart a half-unconscious jealousy had sprung into existence. She had never cared for Ursula: she disliked having a middle-aged niece with her, she disliked

Ursula's grey hair and disliked her eye glasses Ursula was too much a reduplication of herself in appearance. Now, as the emptiness of life stared Lady Dorothy hard in the face, she began to feel jealous of Ursula. Lady Dorothy had lost her husband and had lost her dog, but Ursula had not lost Maud. Maud belonged to Ursula; between Maud and herself stood Ursula.

"He was spared old age," said Ursula gently. "He must have been killed in a moment—it must have been almost painless."

Lady Dorothy was not to be consoled so easily. Although Kiddie could not be prepared (in the usual way) for the next world (if there is one for dogs), there might be (who knows?) some way of making him understand that the parting was not for ever. "You've never lost anybody—recently," moaned Lady Dorothy, and then she added almost in the same sob, "Where's Maud?"

After the bustle, noise and excitement of the day, No. 2, Brown Street was still; except in the servants' quarter, the lower part of the house was in darkness. Maud was in the dressing-room, where by her aunt's urgent request a bed had been made for her. At the sound of her Aunt Dorothy's call Maud opened the door and came into the room.

"Go to bed, Ursula," said Maud, in a low voice. "I shall leave the dressing-room door wide open so that Aunt Dorothy can call me any moment. It is nearly half-past twelve and you look frightfully tired."

Maud followed her sister to the door—and then at a sign from her followed her into the passage. "I want to speak to you," said Ursula, in a whisper. "Aunt Dorothy will be better quite alone with you—I think I irritate her. Now some one must go back to our Brighton lodgings to pack up all our things and warehouse them. I will go to-morrow by the first morning train. You will stay behind, dear, and try and comfort poor Aunt Dorothy."

Ursula spoke in a tone of command. She always did that when what she commanded was what she knew would best please Maud. She never discovered that by doing so she betrayed herself; the idea did not cross her mind, her guile was so simple.

Maud stood looking at her sister's face. "Can you do the packing alone?" she asked, and her eyes fell.

The pretence was meaningless—Ursula was one of those women who always can do everything alone. Maud knew it, had always known it, but she had to say something—she had to pretend to protest.

"I don't need you," said Ursula, "and I will send you anything you want. I shall know what you are likely to need for now and for our holiday together."

"Yes," said Maud slowly—"for our holiday together," and she stood with downcast eyes.

"Good night, dear," said Ursula and kissed her. She waited for one brief moment, but Maud said nothing except "Good night." Ursula

moved away. Maud went into her aunt's bedroom. "I am going to bed, dear Aunt Dorothy," she said, going up to the old lady. "I shall hear you if you call ever so softly. Will that content you?"

Lady Dorothy sighed.

"Try and sleep," said Maud, "if you can."

"I can't sleep, child," was the reply.

"Try," said Maud again, and she bent down and kissed her aunt's cheek. Then she went back into the dressing-room, leaving the door wide open.

Maud lay awake thinking. Ursula had hoped that when she said "Good night" Maud would say something about that "holiday together," would give some sign that she anticipated, valued, the future that the two sisters were to spend together—and Maud had said nothing. Even now, almost at the hour of parting, she had not broken the reserve. To the same old obstinate refusal to face the inevitable, to the same feeble procrastinating spirit to which she had sacrificed Lionel, she was now sacrificing Ursula.

How was she to fight against her weakness? How conquer her moral cowardice and make herself strong? With Lionel, the stimulus to speak out had at last come to her through the sudden interposition of Fitzherbert. Now, who was there who could help her?

As she lay thinking in the darkness she heard a voice. A footstep was outside her door and she heard a rustle.

"Aunt Dorothy," she called, and she put out her hand and turned on the light.

It was Lady Dorothy. Her dressing-gown was wrapped carelessly round her. Her face was flushed and her eyes brilliant, her hair disordered.

"Maud," she said, "I can't sleep. My head aches, aches with thinking."

Maud took her aunt's hands in hers—they were burning with fever.

"The Moncktons have had nothing but misfortunes lately," she began, speaking hurriedly and in a weak voice. "There was your grandfather who gambled the old place away; then your father was an unbeliever and lost his first wife; then Ursula never had an offer of marriage in the whole of her life. Now Stella is married to poor George and she'll never be able to live on his income, take my word for that. Then I lost my husband, and now I have lost Kiddie and you." Then Lady Dorothy stared excitedly at the girl. "Here you go and send away, of all men in the world, Major Kames—you ruin your life for no reason—for no proper reason. It is the bad luck of the Moncktons." She spoke feverishly: "Oh! the world is a sad, sad place!"

Maud got out of bed and put her arm round the thin, stiff, little figure.

"Go back to bed, dear. Come, I will take you. Don't talk, don't think."

For an hour Maud watched by the bed until at last her aunt's eyes closed and the old lady

lay still, but breathing rapidly and unevenly. Kiddie's covered basket on the sofa was looking solemn in the pale morning light.

Maud went to bed and slept till the household was astir.

When she looked into her aunt's room she saw her still dozing, but with some slight trace of fever in the cheeks and in the hasty breathing.

Maud found Ursula already dressing and they decided to telephone for the family doctor.

"It's only nerves," he said, when he went downstairs with Maud, after seeing his patient; "but you must remember that she's an elderly lady and you must keep her quiet."

"How quiet?" asked Maud.

"A little bromide will probably put her all right," he replied. "Keep her in bed till I come again."

So Ursula went down to Brighton alone, and waited for news of her Aunt Dorothy while she packed her own and her sister's possessions and pondered over the future. In a couple of days Lady Dorothy was well enough to come down to the drawing-room. Her thoughts were not solely about Kiddie and the sad speculation as to whether he still existed in some other state of being, for the jealousy of Ursula was growing within her and it culminated in a sudden flare.

"Maud," she said, from the couch where she was resting, "the doctor wants me to go away. You heard that?"

Maud assented.

"I shall go abroad if you will come with me;

but if Ursula objects to that, then I shall remain here and I shan't go away."

She spoke with abruptness, and then taking out her handkerchief shed a few tears.

"I alone, without Ursula?" asked Maud gently.

"Yes," said Lady Dorothy. "She might spare you a little while surely, considering all I have gone through."

Maud was silent. Would Ursula consent? Of course she would. Ursula always consented to sacrifice herself.

"You don't want to go with me?" demanded Lady Dorothy.

"Yes," said Maud. She dared not say even to herself that her sentence was reprieved, that she could put off that final decision—where she and Ursula were to pass the long dreary years that stared in front of them.

"Considering all you have lost and all I have lost," murmured Lady Dorothy, "I think we should find a little holiday abroad together a real comfort to both of us. So write at once to Ursula, child, and get it settled."

So Maud wrote, feeling hot and guilty and excited. For twenty-four hours Lady Dorothy was impatiently awaiting Ursula's reply.

"What does she say?" she demanded of Maud almost before her niece had opened the letter.

"She says 'certainly,'" said Maud, and her cheeks burned, partly with shame at her own thoughts. "And she will remain on at Brighton."

"It can't really matter to her very much. In fact I should think it would really suit her," said Lady Dorothy, closing her eyes and speaking softly. "She is in excellent health and has lost no one and has so many little occupations of a religious and philanthropic kind—all in Brighton."

And so it was settled—and no sooner was it settled than Lady Dorothy began to pick up her strength a little and, through her constant tears, to make shrewd useful suggestions to Maud about what clothes would be necessary to take with them. Also she sketched out a general plan of the route they should take.

Maud had been abroad many times with Ursula and Stella. Ursula's thrift had enabled her to take her sisters abroad when a richer and less judicious woman would have found it financially impossible. The question, therefore, was not where Maud would care to go but where Lady Dorothy thought it was "least unbearable." That was how she put it and wished Maud to put it, so they both put it like that.

The old lady had never been abroad in her life except to school in Paris. Mr. Broughton had disliked foreigners and foreign places, and since his death Lady Dorothy had spent her life in London varied by a month in Perthshire during August and September. The whole of Europe was before her, all new and unknown, where she could wander lamenting the loss of the dearest companion of her later life. And so it was settled that they would go to the places

where it would be "least unbearable," and in about a fortnight's time.

When that time at last came Lady Dorothy with many tears and heartfelt sighs went into the little back-garden at No. 2, Brown Street with Maud and laid some flowers on Kiddie's grave for the last time—perhaps for weeks—or for months. The Jacksons would look after the grave and not forget to put flowers upon it every week.

Perhaps the sentiment of this parting would have been too great a strain on Lady Dorothy's nerves had not there been a certain haste necessary in their visit to the garden. They had to have lunch earlier than usual and then drive to Charing Cross in ample time—as during August there was always a crowded boat train and some delay in registering the luggage. Then came what Maud dreaded, the meeting with Ursula and the "Good-bye." The plan was that Ursula, who had decided to get other lodgings in Brighton for the present, should run up to town to see them off. She did not propose coming to Brown Street but meeting them at Charing Cross. Whether this was because Ursula felt the parting too much to wish to prolong it, or because she foresaw some possible friction from Aunt Dorothy's side, Maud could not guess.

"You are good, Ursula," whispered Maud, as she kissed her sister. "You are generous."

Quite oblivious of the significance of the parting to Ursula, Lady Dorothy met her in the spirit of one who has suffered, and who wishes

to be duly commiserated. Kiddie's funeral had taken place since she last saw Ursula, all these plans had been sketched out for the distraction of her grief since she last saw her, and she kissed her niece with a certain suffering solemnity.

As soon as they had secured a carriage it seemed to Lady Dorothy that as they were leaving Ursula behind something should be said suitable to the occasion.

"You know, my dear," she said, leaning from her corner to the window and speaking down at Ursula in a languid voice, "that I need more than just Eugenie in my present condition. I dare say you don't know how ill I was, but that you shouldn't realise it is all to the good; Maud knows. One cannot go through an immense strain and not suffer in bodily health. Also there is the question of Maud's own health. I think she needs a complete change, for say what you will, she has never looked quite the same since last February."

This was the first time that the subject had been even hinted at in the presence of the two sisters. Neither looked at the other.

"You know," continued Lady Dorothy, "that we have never let the young couple know of the awful tragedy of my darling's death. I thought it might spoil their honeymoon, so we shall not say a word about it till they return home. So please don't mention it, Ursula."

Lady Dorothy was already using the words "we" and "us" very freely as if she and Maud, as a matter of course, belonged to each other.

"So you are really going to stay on at Brighton," she continued, out of the carriage window. "Such a good plan, I think."

"Have you got good lodgings?" broke in Maud.

Ursula, who had all this time been standing, her black bag in her hand, looking through her eyeglasses at her aunt's face and listening to her remarks, said, glancing at Maud:

"My new lodgings are quite nice!"

"Really?" demanded Maud. She was standing up in the carriage. The tickets were collected and the train was about to move. "I don't remember the street."

"Not on the front," said Ursula, "but quite nice."

Maud's doubting eyes searched hers and Ursula repeated "Quite nice. Good-bye, Aunt Dorothy. Good-bye, Maud!"

Maud bent out of the window and clasped her sister's neck.

"God bless you, darling," murmured Ursula, and then the train moved, and Maud saw Ursula standing on the platform looking after them erect and self-possessed, even smiling, her grey hair, her gold eyeglasses, conspicuous under her black hat.

But she did not see the solitary figure drooping as she left the platform, the smile gone. Maud knew nothing of the nerves strung up with the effort to keep down a lump that would rise in the throat as she went on her lonely way.

CHAPTER XVI

For the first month of their travel in France and Switzerland, Lady Dorothy mourned for Kiddie at high pressure. She still felt weak and talked a great deal about the future world—but when they descended into Italy and wandered among the vines and the rich autumn treasures of that ruined Parnassus of the world, her grief lost its sting, her nerves recovered their old vitality and she glided insensibly into a pleasant melancholy mixed with sprightliness. She dwelt tenderly upon the tragedy of loss and the pathos of love and never-to-be-forgotten memories, and at the same time, she enjoyed trying the different white wines of the country and telling Maud which, on the whole, she preferred. Maud smiled and encouraged the frivolity. Lady Dorothy had known nothing but London, relieved in August and September by a visit to Perthshire, for many a long year, and it now occurred to her that she had relapsed into an uneventful routine far too early in her life. She spoke no more of going back very soon and even began to propose staying abroad for the whole winter.

Maud suggested that Ursula should join them, but the very notion of having her "rival"—as she now mentally pictured her—threw the old lady into a fretful gloom.

Ursula, she said, would be far, far happier

doing good works at Brighton and it was quite the best plan for her; it was a charming place and suitable, as she, indeed, had herself admitted in her letters to Maud—so what on earth was the use of dragging her out to Italy? And so the weeks drifted on.

In December they went to Rome, and there Lady Dorothy started a habit of looking about her as if she expected to see some one she knew. She was always putting up her eyeglasses and staring, not at objects of art, but at people.

"What is it, Aunt Dorothy?" questioned Maud. "Haven't you met enough friends already here, many more than I imagined we were likely to come across in December?"

Lady Dorothy bridled and gave her high bridged nose a tilt upward.

"All roads lead to Rome," she said significantly.

"All the old roads," said Maud, "but not the new; the new roads lead to Chicago."

Her remark irritated Lady Dorothy.

"I know nothing about Chicago," she said. "Well, if you insist on knowing whom I am looking for, I am looking—for Major Kames—there!"

Maud's face turned so white that her aunt felt alarmed.

"I have no reason to suppose that he is here," she said hurriedly. "I have never heard anything of him since—that happened—I suppose nobody has—only I can't forget him—you see I cared about him. But I won't say any more, my dear, as you dislike the subject."

Maud had by this time recovered her self-possession. She walked on by her aunt's side; she frowned under the brim of her hat—and thought for the thousandth time—What had become of Lionel Kames? Where was he? Had he forgotten her? She did not deserve that he should remember her! She did not want him to remember her!

"Kiddie would have liked Rome," sighed Lady Dorothy, still thinking of sad things.

It was fortunate for Maud that they stayed so long in Rome and that Lady Dorothy was willing to be left at home for an hour at a time, for her aunt could not be induced to enter any picture gallery or any church or museum more than once—"I have seen it," was her remark. Going to look at the same thing again and again was apt to make people priggish—but, of course, Maud could do as she liked, provided she did not expect anybody else to follow her example.

Maud was indeed thankful to be left alone, for Lady Dorothy felt compelled to pass an opinion on everything she saw. Perhaps the most unbearable remark she made during the whole of their sojourn in that greatest city of the world was when they stood for a moment in the Museo Nazionale, before the relief representing the Birth of Aphrodite. Glancing through her *lorgnon* at the divine girl gazing up with a noble tender salutation to the face of one of her attendant Hours, Lady Dorothy said: "What a comical little figure," and passed on.

Maud could at least wander in peace in the

official but silent company of the sullen Eugenie, and feast her eyes over and over again on the ruined memories of the past.

And what memories they were—were not the very stones of Rome saturated with human blood? From the Bacchic orgies of the Aventine through the several sacks of Rome to the last, that awful riot of human devils under the Constable de Bourbon, through the butcheries of the Coliseum, the tortures of Saint Angelo, the unlimited licence of nobles, of prelates and of Popes; and all through those ages of effort to dominate and dazzle the world ran the secret suffering of slaves and underlings and the corruption of the democracy.

More than once Maud repeated to herself those sinister words of Lionel Kames on the night before they parted, "If we really knew ourselves, we should die of laughing—or go mad." Was that true of Rome? No, it was not true, because behind all this unforgettable gloom of Rome lies the thin pale streak of spiritual light, running unbroken from the obscure and ancient worship of the Bona Dea—through the supreme effort of Paganism to purge itself of materialism and speak the language of the Cross in the mysteries of Mithras, and through the slow making of the Mass, that final and symbolic story of the sacrifice of God Incarnate, which lit the waiting world for ever with a strange glory.

Rome, too, has had her great law-givers and her great organisers, and these few just men

have gained her the gratitude of Europe. Rome lies before us now the dying Mother of the western world. She has for good and for ill made us what we are.

All through that winter Ursula's letters contained no complaint of loneliness, not even a suggestion of it. At the end of May one letter mentioned that she found the spring a little trying—but the letter was otherwise cheerful, and she mentioned hearing a sermon on Whit Sunday at St. Cuthbert's by Father Fitzherbert. She said that he was advertised to give three lectures in Brighton next November. Stella's letters came irregularly. During the honeymoon they had been frequent but very short, and they were elevated in tone. In one letter, longer than the others, she had spoken about realising the greatness and gloriousness of our human nature, how the thought of the bigness of it all overwhelmed her at times, how she was convinced that we were all (especially people who never went to church) reaching after the Divine.

After their return to town Stella wrote a long and enthusiastic letter about the little flat and said that housekeeping could be done ever so easily if it was only done with "brains."

In November she mentioned something about the expense of housekeeping and the "servant" difficulty. The following letter was full of the "servant" difficulty, and she remarked that Maud was lucky in "being out of all that."

In December Broughton, evidently directed

by Stella, wrote to say that Stella was disappointed that they were not coming back to town for Christmas. In February Stella asked when Aunt Dorothy was coming home and that she had been several times to No. 2, Brown Street and found Mrs. Jackson was not in the best of tempers. She had put flowers on Kiddie's grave, as she found that those already on the grave were withered.

In spite of all hints, Lady Dorothy decided not to return home till May, and when May came she told Maud that she dreaded going back to that empty house, and that unless Ursula made "objections," she meant to spend the summer in the mountains overlooking Lugano.

More letters came from Stella, in one of which she mentioned that a small flat was delightful of course, but absolutely impossible for purposes of entertaining and then the "servant" difficulty! Maud inquired after George's work. Stella answered the question in her next letter. George was getting on splendidly with his work, she was sure, but experience had taught her (and after all there is nothing that beats experience) it was healthier for a man to have an entire change of thought when he came home from work and therefore she purposely did not let him talk about it when they were alone together.

In May Stella wrote that they were going to Brighton for a Saturday and Sunday and she hoped that she would not find Ursula too much annoyed at Aunt Dorothy's prolonged stay

abroad. Stella also once wrote a long letter about the pity it was that she had not had the advantages Maud now had of living in Italy—*the* place where you could get the voice properly trained. She also said that, though she thoroughly appreciated the glory of scientific research and all the vast good that it did, she thought that if George could invent something—well, like "Lux"—in the chemical laboratory it would be of infinite value to the public and bring in heaps of money at the same time. She had no doubt but that the inventor of "Lux" was simply rolling——

Her next letter was about a private concert at which she had sung. Unfortunately she was out of practice and had not done herself justice. George, however, thought she had done admirably.

Meanwhile, Ursula stayed on in Brighton and never asked the question, "When are you coming home?" She said that for the sake of her health she had left her Brighton lodgings and had gone to a farm on the Downs. So Maud satisfied herself that, once on the Downs, Ursula would get perfectly well. There was no reason to suppose she wouldn't.

The summer passed away and Lady Dorothy thought it scarcely worth while going back till the end of September; and in September, the weather being lovely, she put off their return till October—because "there was no hurry"; and then October was too fine to miss—and November would be soon enough. They could cross during the first week. Maud saw looming

before her the same old question: What was to be done in the long future? If only Lady Dorothy could have tolerated Ursula and all three lived together in No. 2, Brown Street! But it was clear to Maud that indifference to Ursula had grown into absolute dislike.

At last the day was decided on when they should return home, and Lady Dorothy got so far as to write to Mrs. Jackson.

"What day shall I tell Ursula?" asked Maud. "She has written to ask."

"I don't want to be bound down to to-morrow," said Lady Dorothy irritably. "It depends upon the weather."

That Ursula should have any "right" to know the precise moment when they reached London so as to pounce upon them and claim Maud again exasperated the old lady.

"I would rather you told Ursula," she said, in a businesslike tone, "that I shall ask her to come up to us—as soon as we have rested from the journey. Surely that will do. Nothing is more fatiguing than being met at the station by people who are quite fresh when one is fagged out oneself."

In order to appear strictly reasonable, she directed Maud to forbid George and Stella meeting them at Charing Cross, but permitted them to go to No. 2, Brown Street to welcome the travellers home.

"You must wire to them, of course," added Lady Dorothy, "and you can if you like, wire to Ursula—she may expect it, and you can put in

your telegram that we shall be glad to see her as soon as we have had time to breathe."

The lines round Lady Dorothy's mouth and nostrils tightened with annoyance.

"Time to breathe!" she murmured again. In her mind's eye there was Ursula with her grey hair and her gold eyeglasses and her bag, not giving anybody time to breathe! It was a surprising thing that Major Kames could have liked Ursula so much! But he *was* so genial.

Oh, how empty No. 2, Brown Street would have been if Maud had not been there to dispel the shadows. Lady Dorothy crossed the Channel with an air of enduring the inevitable and got into the train at Dover without expressing any joy at being again in her native land.

"The crossing was not bad—though the sea was choppy," she said. "Well, are you glad to be back?"—she added suddenly, turning to Maud and staring at her.

Maud, taken aback, did not reply quite coherently.

"Are you glad to be back, child?" repeated her Aunt Dorothy. "Back in England."

"No," said Maud. "Not altogether."

Lady Dorothy grunted and said nothing more.

When they arrived at Charing Cross that misty November afternoon, Maud found herself standing up and scanning eagerly the platform although she knew that neither Ursula nor Stella would be there.

Whom did she expect to see? A foolish

wild thought had flashed into her mind. Suppose —that "He" had found out that they were returning home and had determined to speak to her, even if only to say "Good-bye," and to tell her that he had forgiven her!

Among the figures hurrying to and fro and greeting friends was no familiar face.

Jackson was there, of course, looking more than ever the pillar of immemorial respectability.

Maud's heart sank. Why? She could not tell.

"Maud," said Lady Dorothy, as soon as they had got into the old brougham—"I wish there were no gaps in the world!"

CHAPTER XVII

STELLA looked even more beautiful than she had done a year ago. She was now twenty-three, the age which in Englishwomen brings the softness and bloom of youth to its zenith. A woman may become handsomer, more attractive when she is older, but after twenty-three she loses that peculiar and entrancing glow of girlhood. George was evidently proud of his wife's appearance, but he let slip all unconsciously a remark that to Maud was flooded with significance. The remark was:

"Hasn't she made herself smart to greet you?" Stella found it difficult and also unnecessary to be tidy except for occasions. The presence of a lover is always an "occasion," the presence of a husband is a "fact" of daily life, a glorious fact, of course. The first meeting with Maud and Aunt Dorothy since Stella's wedding day was an "occasion."

Under the full glare of the electric light in the drawing-room, Maud thought that George looked thinner than he had been a year ago and she thought she detected an anxious look in his eyes.

"I thought you were never coming back," said Stella, as she sprang upon the necks of her relatives and then began to look round the

drawing-room. Was she already contemplating a musical At Home at which she would perform?

She could scarcely wait for the usual exchange of questions and answers that are customary between people who meet after a long absence in which much of importance has happened.

"May I have Maud to-morrow?" she begged of Lady Dorothy. "I know that you will be deep in talk with Mrs. Jackson for hours—but could Maud come after lunch—then you come and dine with us, Aunt Dorothy, now, do promise—do, do, do!"

Stella's eagerness was so great that Maud surmised that she had something of supreme importance to communicate to her, and so she submitted with a good grace to being taken possession of on the following day. The next morning, she and Aunt Dorothy went into the little back garden and looked at Kiddie's grave—it was a ceremony that had to be gone through and it was thought best to do it between breakfast and lunch. It was sad to think that cats, which had been forbidden the sodden grass and the blackened ivy during Kiddie's lifetime, could now walk over both ostentatiously and even seat themselves upon the little mound beneath which he lay oblivious in his satin-lined coffin. Lady Dorothy was, after all, so much taken up with finding herself among her old possessions and so engrossed with Mrs. Jackson, that Maud was able to start off to Stella's flat without feeling that she was leaving a tragedy behind her. By the first post that morning

a letter had come addressed to her in Ursula's handwriting. The handwriting was shaky for Ursula. Maud did not open it at once; somehow she dared not. It seemed like the seal placed on her home-coming—she would read it later in the morning. Then the morning had passed and Maud said she would read it after lunch. Did it contain some plan for the future? That was what Maud dreaded! What plan could it suggest that would not be dreary? After lunch Maud thought that she would read it on her way to Stella. Feeling like a coward, she put the letter into her muff and sat alone in the old brougham with it still unread. For the moment she had a right to be entirely engrossed in Stella—for Stella had some important secret to tell her alone. Maud guessed what—*the* secret of secrets.

She rushed up the two flights of stairs to the flat and rang the bell. A very dirty maid unlocked the door and called out into the darkness behind her—"Here's Miss Monckton," and switched on the light. Then she looked Maud all over with eyes of approbation.

Maud walked in and looked about her. From an open door emerged Stella in a crimson dressing-gown very much stained down the front. Her hair was, however, done—for the "occasion," and she was smiling and delighted to see her sister. "Clear away the lunch," she called out to the maid and she drew Maud into her bedroom where the electric light was still on and the room in an extraordinary disorder.

"I knew you would understand my not being dressed—as Aunt Dorothy is coming to dinner—I thought I'd dress once and for always just before teatime——"

Maud looked round her. The white painted furniture was already chipped and bruised at all the corners, and one of the white plaster cupids that held up the mirror had been deprived of his nose—not from the effects of constant dusting, for both charming figures had their limbs boldly accentuated by the accumulation of many months of dust.

The pink curtains on the window and pink bed-hangings were half off their hooks—there was an indescribable collection of clothes piled up in one of the corners of the room, as if it was meant ultimately to serve as a support for the ceiling. On the toilet-table were the strange and unornamental bottles and boxes with contents of various kinds in various states of decomposition, which Stella always referred to as "still being useful."

"Isn't it a sweet room?" said Stella, "but just a little untidy to-day. I can't get that impossible girl to do anything properly. There is not one servant in a thousand that's trained nowadays."

Having shown her bedroom as it was in the glory of actual use, Stella took Maud into the drawing-room,—a tiny room full of a grand piano. She put on the electric stove and made her sister sit on the couch opposite it. This room contained no pictures, the wall-paper

provided sufficient scope for meditation in its design of immense birds of some tropical species with blue-green plumage. The square of blue Axminster carpet had a stain on it exactly in front of the stove, as if some one had poured out a libation of coffee, spreading it out with a liberal hand as widely and lengthily as possible. Maud did not know whether to laugh or to cry. What a home for George Broughton! Good Heavens, and with the addition of a baby what would it be like?

"The room is too small for entertaining," said Stella. "It's of no use."

"If you only hadn't a grand piano!" murmured Maud, looking at that article of furniture. Then she added, "But you have something to tell me, Stella," and Maud touched her sister's hand. "I hurried off after lunch as soon as I could."

"I couldn't talk about it before Aunt Dorothy," said Stella, "especially with George there!"

"Yes," said Maud sympathetically, "of course."

"Well, the fact is," said Stella, "that I am in awful straits. I'll explain all about it after—but, to go straight to the point at once—I want you—if you will—and I know you will—to see if you couldn't get Aunt Dorothy to allow George something every year—without telling George."

"Oh!" said Maud aghast.

"It's on George's account, not on mine," continued Stella, "because I have begun to

find out that he isn't at all strong and the least thing worries him. It's a great handicap for a man to be like that; to tell you the truth, Maud, he doesn't, and can't, poor fellow, help me in the least."

"Help you in what?" asked Maud.

"Help me with the housekeeping," said Stella.

"Why on earth should he?"

"I should say why shouldn't he?" said Stella. "Last spring I had overrun my allowance by forty pounds. He saw how it wasn't my fault but just the nature of things and couldn't be helped, and yet he *was* upset about it. Then we went down to Brighton to Ursula and I told her. She gave me forty pounds. Now this time the same thing's happened—I can't make ends meet. I haven't told George because I want to spare him. Naturally, he is sensitive about being able to give me so much less than most women expect. Then I can't myself ask anything more from Ursula, although privately, Maud, I don't know what she can do with her money—as her lodgings must cost her next to nothing."

"The lodgings where she is now?" asked Maud, her heart growing heavier and heavier.

"I haven't seen her since she went to that farm on the Downs. I was speaking of her other lodgings in Brighton—a horrid street; and then she spends nothing on her clothes."

"I know that," said Maud.

"Well, what is to be done?" asked Stella,

as if the whole matter now thoroughly explained rested on Maud's shoulders.

"Shall I come and—and put your affairs in order and see if I couldn't start you again?" asked Maud, after a pause.

Stella eyed her strangely.

"You assume that I am not housekeeping properly."

"Economical housekeeping needs a certain amount of moral courage, but it would be worth while exerting that in order to save George from an early grave." Maud spoke with exasperating calmness.

"Thanks," said Stella, "I'm not going to have poor George starved—if that's what you mean. I have given a standing order to the butcher for chops. I know it is expensive, but then fresh meat is so important."

"Poor George!" murmured Maud, under her breath.

"What I really want, Maud, don't mind my speaking plainly, is more money, not advice."

"You ought to be able to manage on what you have got," said Maud. "I could do it—and give George a new dinner every evening."

There came a short silence, and both girls stared at the electric stove.

"You must remember, my dear Maud," said Stella at last, in an icy voice, "that you are speaking to a girl who has shown herself willing to face poverty for the man she loves. Except for George's sake, I couldn't have gone through with what I have endured this last eighteen

months. Perhaps you don't understand what love can do—I don't think you can—or you wouldn't have behaved as you did to Major Kames. You would have either accepted him or refused him straight away."

Stella leant back into her corner of the couch, feeling morally justified in saying what she was saying. Maud had behaved disgracefully to Major Kames and yet no one had been allowed to blame her. Not a word had ever been spoken on the subject by Ursula, and even Aunt Dorothy had been extraordinarily silent and forgiving. Maud was always the favourite with both women and had, therefore, got an exaggerated opinion of herself.

Like George IV. with his personal recollections of the battle of Waterloo, Stella had acquired the belief that she had "practically" refused Major Kames "straight away."

George had for so long told her that she was the most beautiful and the most gifted woman in the world that it naturally followed that Major Kames must have preferred her to Maud, and had "sort of proposed" only that she would not do him the injustice to let him "quite propose." Maud had angled for him and then jilted him. She *had* behaved disgracefully.

"Nothing that you can say," said Maud, in a suppressed voice, "would make me realise better than I do now, how meanly I behaved to Lionel Kames."

"I'm glad you think so," said Stella. "And I really think that the worry of it affected Ursula's

health. Last May she was like a skeleton. She pretended that she wasn't ill and was quite vexed at my speaking of it. I don't think she is really any better now, because when I wrote to ask she evaded an answer." Stella's voice was full of moral conviction.

"Don't think me disagreeable, Maud," she said, "I merely want you to see that while you are discussing my affairs, you must remember that I could discuss yours—if I wanted to, only I don't want to."

Maud did not reply—she could feel Ursula's letter in her muff—Ursula like a skeleton! Was that true, or was it merely said to emphasise Stella's sermon?

"Is Ursula seriously unwell?" she demanded. "If so, I ought to go to her at once. Why didn't you tell me last night, Stella?"

Perhaps that letter contained the truth. Why had she not opened it? She could not do so now in Stella's presence—she must wait.

"I didn't say she was seriously unwell," said Stella. "I said she looked a little ill when we were with her and I don't know that she is right yet! Now do you think you could discuss the question of George's income with Aunt Dorothy? After all, she has no relation nearer than George and he has always been so nice to her."

Maud pondered. So Ursula was not really very ill—only she had been unwell enough to want to leave Brighton and live in the healthy

air of the Downs. That she had known before. Perhaps she *was* well by now.

"Suppose we go through your bills and accounts, Stella," said Maud. "When I can see exactly how you stand, it might be possible to talk to Aunt Dorothy."

Stella's face dimpled and her earrings swayed.

"I'll try and collect some of them," she said, "if you will wait here. I have great faith in your practical wisdom, Maud. Your mind is the matter-of-fact kind that dwells naturally on small details. Now mine doesn't. Detail wearies me—I can't do with it—I want something big to handle." And she got slowly up from the couch and went out of the room.

Maud could hear her moving about the flat, calling to the maid at times. It sounded as if the bills had to be gathered up from every corner of the house.

So Ursula was as thin as a skeleton in May. Was that only said by Stella in order to make her accusation sharper?

Ursula had been unwell. But surely she was well again!

Maud had still got her muff on her knees. She pulled Ursula's letter from it. The writing was shaky. She had noticed that, but Ursula might have written in a hurry. She tore open the envelope and spread out the page over her muff. It was clearly her duty to read the letter without delay in case there was something in it that required an immediate answer. She began reading.

"My Darling Maud,

"All this time I have kept my illness from you. I knew you needed rest and happiness—after your trouble—Besides you could not have done anything for me, but have the pain of seeing me gradually get weaker. I thank God that you have been spared that and in the most natural way in the world.

"I have just got your wire. Dear, come to me now, because I think my time is very short.

"Your loving sister,

"Ursula."

Maud raised the letter nearer to her eyes—it shook in her hands. Yet the words were there, there was no way of reading them any differently.

She uttered a short cry and then sat still and tried to read the letter yet once again. Before she had mastered half of it, she rose from the couch, her limbs trembling, and she went out of the room unsteadily.

"Stella!" she called. "Stella!"

"What has happened?" replied Stella, appearing slowly with her hands full of crumpled papers.

"Have you any money in the house, Stella?"

"No," said Stella promptly.

Maud tore out her purse. She had half a sovereign in it and some silver. Her speech came with difficulty, she spoke as if she could not breathe.

"Ursula is very ill. I must go at once down

to her. I have just enough money. Go at once to Aunt Dorothy and explain——"

"What do you mean? How have you heard?" began Stella.

"I can't stop," cried Maud, "every minute is precious. Do what I tell you, Stella," and the girl ran towards the hall door.

"Stop!" cried Stella.

"Stop! when Ursula is dying!" cried Maud, and she fumbled at the door. She pulled it violently open and rushed down the stairs.

Where was there a taxi to be got? She ran down the street. Thank God! there was a stand.

"To Victoria Station for Brighton," she said. It would take her ten minutes to get to the station.

At the station she called to the porter, who came to the door.

"When is the next train to Brighton?"

"The express has just gone," he said.

"When is the next?"

"Not till five o'clock."

A whole hour to wait!

CHAPTER XVIII

The day before, when they had crossed the Channel, there had been a moderate wind blowing from the south-west and a slightly choppy sea, but during the night the wind must have increased. That morning, in London, Maud had scarcely noticed the weather. Her thoughts had been too busy. Only when she reached Stella's flat and she had got out of the carriage and shut the door behind her, she had felt a cold gust catch at her furs and blow them over her shoulder.

But all her thoughts in the train from Victoria to Brighton mingled in a sinister fashion with the sound of the wind bursting angrily against the carriage-windows. Ursula lying ill at Down Farm would be listening too, to the sound of the wind, for there must be a gale blowing in the Channel.

The Brighton station was gusty and bitterly cold when she arrived on that November evening.

Maud twisted her furs closely round her and made for the nearest taxi.

She only vaguely knew where the farm was where Ursula was staying. She knew that she must first take the road to Rottingdean and then the road to Newhaven.

"There's a road to the farm," she said sharply,

for the taxi man's face expressed a gloomy scepticism when she gave him the address. "Doctors are going to the farm, for there is illness there, so we must be able to get there. At Rottingdean ask your way," she said with a fierce look at the man and got into the taxi and banged the door.

The man grunted and began to get his machinery into action.

Strange thoughts came swiftly into Maud's brain as they sped through the narrow crowded streets towards Kemp Town. In this spot so much had happened towards the shaping of her destinies. To Maud, events seemed to "happen." She had, indeed, never deliberately tried to shape them. Her youth had been a record of "drift." She realised just now that if she had believed in the next world, she would have done nothing to prepare for it; and feeling certain only of this life, she had done her best to waste it! In thinking of the past, it came forcibly to her that she had been very diligent about small matters, but that she had never set out to "justify her existence." Justify it to whom? Was it not easier to live in the days when human races worshipped the sun? They could at least see their god, and though he daily passed out of their sight and left them at the mercy of the powers of darkness till his return, still return he did each morning. Each morning he rose triumphant, dispersing the gloom and terrors of the night, and his worshipper lying prostrate before the rising god could feel that immeasurable

mystic hand seeking him across the morning mists and striking him on the brow and hair like a sublime lover.

The narrow gusty streets were soon passed and the taxi turned up a short wide street poorly lit by lamp-posts, and then it sped on again between another narrow unfrequented row of dingy houses, a mews and a squalid shop or two, and then they struck upon the open road where no lights were to be seen and where the wind swept down from the sea upon the car and beat against it.

What Maud had taken for the roaring of the sea was really the roaring of the wind. What a night for Ursula lying alone in the solitary Down Farm!

On they went, a glimmer here and there of lights from some house and the blank line of the banks on each side of her was all that Maud could see. She could hear that they were ascending a steep incline, for the car raked wearily up it. Presently, they came upon a group of lights and Maud knew they were entering Rottingdean.

The car stopped dead, and she could both see and hear that the driver was shouting a question to a man who came out of the little low-roofed inn and shouted back at him. The driver must have got the information he wanted for he started again, turned inland abruptly and then out again on to a coast road, and they were again battling with the elements, and on each side was pitch darkness.

Peer as closely as she would, Maud could see nothing but the roadway, lit up by the car lamps, and newly turned stony soil and beyond that—nothing!

Why had Ursula isolated herself from other habitations when she was so seriously ill? If it was true that she was dying, why did she stay out on these lonely downs? Oh, Ursula, Ursula!

At last the taxi came to a dead stop and Maud let down the window. The man came round and spoke to her, his words seemed blown about and very sinister.

"Here's the cart track to Down Farm, Miss," he said. "It must be the right one, for they said it was a few yards from those coastguard cottages what you can see on a-head. But I can't take my car any further, this 'ere road would knock it all to pieces."

Maud looked out. Where they stood a narrow deeply rutted track ran at right angles northward.

"The house is about a stone's throw from here, Miss, so they said."

"Can't you take the car on the turf?" asked Maud, opening the door, but not stepping out.

"The turf only goes on a few feet and then there's stubble," said the man. "I can't take the car on that. You'll have to get out here, Miss, or else go back."

Maud got out slowly. Her furs were blown furiously round her—her skirts clung to her ankles. No house was visible—she stared along

the narrow track for a few yards and then saw stretching beyond that empty darkness. She felt thankful that she was in England and not abroad in such a situation. She must gather all her courage together and brave it out. She looked in her purse—and gave the man his fare.

"Shall I wait?" he asked, "and see if you come back," for he was half ashamed of letting her go alone into the black night.

Maud seized the offer at once. "Wait for me a quarter of an hour just in case—I am wrong—and there is no house," she said. "Here is three shillings—it's all I have with me. Promise faithfully you'll wait."

"Oh, I'll wait," said the man. "I'll take out a light to guide you a little way. I'd come with you, but I daren't leave my car."

"Good night," said Maud.

The man said good night and took off one of his lights, and Maud saw him, as she once turned, an unsteady black figure holding the lamp, the great flickering fan of brilliance in front of him getting fainter and fainter as it reached her. It was something, at least, to know that he was there behind on the main road. And then there was—Ursula—poor darling Ursula waiting for her at the end of the darkness. Urged by this thought, she stepped out boldly almost blown along by the wind until she reached the utmost fringe of the light beyond which lay the darkness. Then she stumbled along, almost running. She could have cried with fear, only that Ursula—dear Ursula, was surely there—needing

her—expecting her—wondering why she did not come! In a few seconds she saw in front of her a small dark object. It was the farm! What a welcome sight! It made her run all the faster, full of hope now—she seemed almost to be lifted on the wings of the wind. It was the farm—there was a light in one of the windows! There would be Ursula! Here was a little gate! She pushed her way through and it banged violently with the wind. She could see that the house was low and square, and that the door was in the middle, and that there was a single step up to it. She searched for a knocker or a bell with her hand, she felt a knocker and rapped it heavily on the door. She knocked again and again. It seemed an age while she waited in the cold, and with the wind tearing at her hat and whipping at her skirts, making her ankles sting with cold. Would Ursula come out of her room and greet her, was she well enough to do that or would she be lying in bed in the candle-light? Maud's heart beat. The door opened, a light flickered inside.

"Is this Down Farm?" asked Maud.

A nurse, a simple-looking quiet girl, held the door open. "Yes, yes."

No further words were necessary. She did not see the curious expression on the nurse's face as she caught at the door to prevent it from banging and held it open for Maud to pass within.

Maud entered the narrow hall and stood eagerly waiting till the door was shut and bolted. "How is Miss Monckton?" she asked.

The nurse turned away without speaking and

went to the foot of the stairs. Maud followed. At the foot of the stairs, she turned again and said, "I am afraid the letter never reached you by the first post this morning, Miss Monckton."

The pulses in Maud's head began to beat violently.

"Yes," she said, and her lips were so dry that even that monosyllable was difficult to pronounce.

The nurse looked astonished.

"I'm afraid, Miss Monckton, it'll be a great shock to you. You won't have realised how very ill Miss Monckton was. She passed away this morning."

Maud put out her hand and touched the wall, for she felt dazed and uncertain where she was.

"She was longing so much to see you, but we never thought the end was so near," said the nurse. "The doctor himself thought that she might live another week or ten days."

"She expected me this morning?" gasped Maud.

"Yes, Miss, and we couldn't think what had happened—whether you had missed your train. We sent a wire this afternoon—to you—not knowing what to do. But, of course, it missed you! It was while she was still speaking of you—that the end suddenly came."

Maud leaned against the wall and covered her face with her hands.

"Don't grieve too much, Miss," said the nurse, taking her arm. "Come and see her,

she is so peaceful; it will help you to bear it when you see how happy she is."

Together they went stiffly and slowly up the stairs. At the top were two shabby narrow doors, one looking each way. The nurse put out her hand, turned a key and led Maud into a low-ceilinged cottage-bedroom. The blinds were drawn and a candle burned on the little dressing-table. On an iron bedstead in the farthest corner, by the fireplace, in which only scattered ashes remained, lay a motionless form under the quilt. In the shadowy candle-light, Maud saw her face, very thin and white and small, but relaxed into the placitude of death. Is there no way of reaching out to speak to the souls whom we have neglected, whom we have allowed to suffer alone? Is there no way of asking pardon, no way of telling them of our remorse? Is there no forgiveness of sins?

CHAPTER XIX

MAUD found herself being led out of the room again into the bare chilly passage. She was dry-eyed, but shivering from head to foot. The nurse closed the door of the bedroom and locked it again. Across the tiny landing a door stood a little way open. That was Maud's bedroom. The nurse took her in and helped her to take off her things. This was done in silence, and then they went downstairs to the sitting-room. "You must eat some supper," said the nurse, and she looked anxiously into Maud's face.

There was a fire burning and a white china lamp on the table in the middle of the room. By the side of the fire was a stiff old-fashioned arm-chair with a high back, and close beside it against the wall a little narrow table covered with books. Under the table, on the floor, was a workbasket so familiar to Maud that it made her heart stand still. Was Ursula really dead? Could it be possible? What was "death"? What did it mean? On the other side of the fire was a long lean sofa covered with brown oilcloth, and on the back was a striped woollen antimacassar. Maud sat down on the sofa. Later she would try to think coherently, for there would be business to do and the last services for Ursula. She must not give way. She shaded her eyes

with her hand and sat perfectly still. She could hear supper being laid for her and she listened mechanically to the storm without. All these noises belonged to the world in which she lived, the world of her sight and touch, the world which one day would—for her too—cease to exist. Was that true, or was there any hope of a future life where wrongs could be made right and the crooked paths made straight, hopes fulfilled and the longings of the human heart for righteousness and peace be satisfied at last?

Suddenly she noticed that the nurse was speaking in her ear and urging her to try and eat some supper, using the argument that "Miss Monckton would be distressed if she knew that her sister was neglecting herself in her sorrow; that Miss Monckton was the best and kindest patient she had ever had."

Maud rose at once and sat down to the table. Food was painful to swallow, but it had to be done and could be done.

Later on, Maud wrote letters and telegrams that were to be sent off the first thing in the morning, and as she wrote, she could hear half-consciously only, that the wind was getting louder and more insistent. The long night had to be got through—somehow. Maud dreaded going up to her room, but that also had to be done. She had the shock of seeing the nurse bring into her bedroom garments that had belonged to the dead—a dressing-gown, night things and bedroom-slippers—for Maud had

nothing of her own with her. Toilet things too were brought to her from that locked room, and finally, two or three books of devotion from beside that silent bed, and a black manuscript-book fastened by an elastic band. Each time the nurse came in or went out a puff of smoke was blown down the chimney into the room by the wind. Then the nurse poked the fire and heaped on more coals.

She asked if Maud would like the lamp from the sitting-room, and Maud, not knowing or caring what happened, said "Yes," and the lamp was brought to her and placed on the toilet table near the window.

"I forgot to tell you, Miss," said the nurse, as she moved to the door, "that a message has been sent to Father Fitzherbert."

Maud stared at her with widened eyes. "Mr. Fitzherbert was to come to-morrow to give poor Miss Monckton the sacrament. She was so much looking forward to your being with her for that. I sent a message to Mr. Fitzherbert that she had passed away unexpectedly and suddenly, and not knowing his address at Brighton—I sent it along with a letter to Major Kames at the Princes Hotel."

Here the nurse paused, but Maud said nothing.

"We can't think why Major Kames never came this morning. Miss Monckton expected him just as she expected you, Miss. Just a few minutes before she died, she felt it coming—I know she did, I was standing by the bed doing her hair and we were talking of you, Miss. She

called for you and for him—as if you were both just outside the door, and then fell back on the pillow—unconscious—until the end came. But he knows now that she is gone."

Maud still stood by the fire stiffly and said nothing.

"You look so white, Miss," said the nurse. "Had I better fetch you a little brandy? You see you've been through such a lot."

"No!" said Maud. "Thank you, I need nothing—nothing! Good night."

The nurse left the room closing the door behind her sharply, for the latches of the house were old and shaky and the wind was pulling at windows and doors as if to wrench them from their fastenings.

When the nurse's step had ceased to sound upon the creaking stairs, Maud turned round to the bed and flinging herself down on her knees, gave way to a paroxysm of grief which had no relief in tears. Only she—she who should have done most—had neglected the dead—others had done their part! How long she lay moaning as if in acute physical pain she did not know, but all the time the wind battled with the house, and to Maud, the whole world seemed in conflict. There was pain in every throb of nature and everywhere voices speaking of death. Would that death would come to her—of what use was her life? It was nothing but a little foolish talk about futile things and would end in—silence.

She could hear an old clock below striking with crazy but vibrating notes—twelve! She

rose from the bed. The fire was getting low—she put on more coals. She took off her shoes and put on the black bedroom-slippers that had been Ursula's. Then she slowly took off her dress and put on the dressing-gown. She dared not wear Ursula's night-dress, it would be a horrible profanation. She drew a large, old, battered arm-chair to the fire and sat down before it shivering with the cold and listened to the storm.

The wind had some devilish cruelty in it. After a terrific roar it dashed off wailing to the distant weald—out of hearing, and then the night seemed to drop into silence—but such a silence—it breathed of coming danger. The wind had secretly gone back to the sea and had hidden itself—it was coming again from afar off. Maud listened for it, her head buried in her hands, waiting and dreading. It was coming again—yes, it was coming. Maud strung up her nerves to bear it when it did come. It was coming. With a sudden crash it came, and the very spirit of the storm hung roaring at the window. It strove madly to get in, raving at the keyhole, hooting down the chimney in a hoarse ominous voice, and then, its passion dying out, it fled back again to the weald, muttering and moaning as it fled—smothering its cries and checking its breath, panting and groaning into a deadly silence—till it should come again—from the sea.

Maud put out her hand and grasped at the books that had belonged to Ursula and that lay

at the foot of the white lamp. She opened first one and then the other, turning over the pages. She came upon a passage underlined:

"Incline Thine ear unto me, oh Lord, for I am poor and in misery."

Maud turned over the other leaves with a feverish care, as a penitent might search the pages of a long confession of his sins—unwilling to miss one—anxious to drink the cup of his humility to the dregs.

She could find no other passage underlined. But that solitary one contained the cry of a life-time! Maud took the black manuscript-book in her hands and began to unfasten the elastic band. The pages were full of Ursula's handwriting. Maud's heart beat almost to suffocation! Here would be in full, written down, sentence by sentence, the details of Ursula's sufferings! Had the diary been begun when she first felt the weakness of her illness or had she begun it because as the month's dragged on she felt more and more solitary? To read it was part of Maud's penance. To close these pages would be to refuse to bear part of her punishment.

Most of the entries merely recorded rain or sunshine, books begun or finished, a visit from a friend or letters received—from Maud. But there were some longer entries here and there, and it was these that Maud searched with passionate attention.

"April 10.—I thought that I should not feel lonely, but I do now that the days have drawn out. In the winter one can draw the curtains and sit by the fire absorbed in books, but now in the small shabby room looking out on a street, with the cold grey light of a spring evening lengthening hour after hour I feel lonely. I can hear my landlady at the street door gossiping with her husband and neighbours. At last the light dwindles and the lamps are lit in the street and I can light my gas and draw down the blinds, thankful that darkness has come.

"The few friends I have in Brighton take for granted that I live here because I want to be in the neighbourhood from which I draw little girls who come to my class on Saturday afternoons. They would not come to me if I lived on the Parade. They are not afraid to come here, they live close by. No letter to-day from Maud and I had expected one."

"April 28.—I ought not to be depressed, because since she left me I have saved out of my income nearly one hundred and fifty pounds. This saving gives me something to live for while she is away. I have the passion of a miser in me for her sake. She cannot—as I can—endure sordid surroundings—that is partly her youth—partly her love of all that is beautiful and orderly. But I ask myself sometimes whether there is not some selfishness behind all this saving for Maud, because all the time I picture her spending

it—*with me*, while what she needs is a life, not with me, but with husband and children, a full life such as every woman should have. God grant it to her."

"May 15.—My class of little girls on Saturday afternoon is growing bigger. I think I understand children. I know I can speak to them as I can't to grown persons. But beyond teaching them how to sew and how to mend their clothes, I have done little. Although they are all at the Council school their ignorance is amazing, and they care to hear of nothing except stories of other children. So I have to work my instruction in in that way. We begin with tea, and that is a never exhausted source of pleasure to them. It gives an air of social dissipation to the work, without which, I doubt if I could induce them to leave the streets."

"May 21.—I am afraid that Stella and George were shocked at these rooms. The only comfort is that they got some good golf on Saturday and a long walk on Sunday in the lovely sunshine. Then they went back to town. After all they only had one evening in these cramped lodgings, all the rest of the time they were out of doors. George looked less tired on Sunday evening I thought.

"That forty pounds I gave to Stella out of my savings for Maud, I gave grudgingly, I am afraid. I blame myself, now that it is too late, for having done so little to strengthen Stella's

character. It is so hard to struggle with a mind that naturally sees little beyond its immediate wants. Still that was the work that was given me to do and I failed!

"Did I, after all, do anything to help Maud? I begin to believe that I have failed all through. Maud was so anxious to learn and so lovable that I was deceived into thinking that *I* was doing my task well.

"I shall never forget one hot August afternoon on the east coast when Maud was about six years old and playing with other little ones. I had taken tea down to the beach, it was over and the other children sprang up eager to romp again. I reminded Maud of 'saying thanks.' Instead of being impatient with me she smiled in the sweetest way and joining her hands bent over them for a moment with a rapt expression of grateful prayer. Then she sprang up and joined her companions. I could have caught her to my heart with admiration and joy. But so soon her father's influence drove away all that beautiful trust in a Divine Spirit—and I could do nothing. I have so little moral courage. I cannot lead—in the presence of opposition. I feel crushed and helpless. Sometimes I am absolutely tongue-tied and cannot express the simplest ideas with any effectiveness. . . . I have a sort of mental stammer. In the presence of children I lose this. I did not suffer from it with Lionel, I felt a different woman. His generous sympathy, his unruffled good nature made me feel at ease. It seems to me now

incredible that there could have been any time when I did not appreciate him, when I saw only little defects in breeding and thought he was worldly. Afterwards, everything he did and said seemed to me to have its worth, as characteristic of him and of nobody else. Being a coward by nature, the 'protection' of his presence had in that short time become a necessity to me. Where is he now? He is constantly in my thoughts, but I cannot picture him anywhere. Is he at Orpenden?"

"June 2.—The hot weather exhausts me. I used not to feel heat, but I think this weakness that has been creeping over me lately accounts for it.

"Yesterday I gave my little girls a treat. We drove to the Dyke in the morning and spent the whole day in the open air. I had taken food with me—including buns and oranges. I sat and looked at the great weald stretching before us while the children played about. I think they were very happy and I ought to have been but for the haunting knowledge that Maud dreads coming back to me. She has never told me, but I know! What can I do? If only she could have loved Lionel! Not to love him would be the harder task to me! The thought of Maud, and Maud dreading a future alone with me, made the sunny weald look full of trouble. I could not shake off the trouble even when we were driving home and I was telling the children a story to keep them quiet. The air was getting a little chilly when we turned into the London

Road. As we passed the old square grey house that is said to be haunted, the windows were lit up by the setting sun. The children stared with all their might as we drove by, looking back at the house, glad and yet awed to think it had an evil reputation."

"June 13.—At last I had the courage to go to a doctor. I wish I had gone before, but I grudged the money. It is indigestion that is the matter with me. I weigh now with all my clothes on under eight stone. I have some sort of digestive medicine to take and am to go and see the doctor again in a fortnight. I believe that I should get well at once if I could stay on the Downs for a short time, but it would mean giving up my classes and all the other work that I have gathered round me. A kind letter from Maud makes me already feel better, and I have as yet only taken one dose of the medicine."

"June 30.—The doctor advises me to go to Down Farm for the summer. I long, myself, for the Downs, but to give up my class as well as my other duties now when I am free to do what I like, seems so selfish, because when Maud comes back we may not even live at Brighton. And yet Maud must be my first consideration. I must get well for her return. It will be so dismal for her to come back and find me thin and weak and useless. I shall carry out the doctor's advice and I must break the news to my class on Saturday. I dread telling them—

it seems like breaking faith with them, they have stuck to me so loyally—and I believe happily."

"July 25.—There could be no kinder people than these farm people. An old man and his wife belonging to the old yeoman class—some of our best English blood—their family have farmed here for three hundred years. They have all the fine feeling of gentry with the simplicity of peasants. The son is slow and methodical and full of humour, and the niece who waits on me is a good-hearted girl with a magnificent contralto voice, but alas—no ear! The Vicar has come to see me, a kind sensible man, and his wife came with him. I like her too, very fresh and unworldly—but I think they suffer from want of any society of their own class. I gathered so from her.

"Is it because I am idle here and have too much time to think of myself that I feel no better in health? The sight of food nauseates me!

"My happiest time is in the mornings when I take my deck-chair outside just to the corner of the house. There I can sit on a dry bit of farm road close to the great wheat-field that stretches to the south and beyond which lies a rim of green and then the opal sea as far as the eye can reach.

"This morning I heard a slight movement near me and out of the short yellow forest of wheat a speckled hen stepped on to the grassy edge. She was surprised at finding herself so near me. She stood on one foot, fixing me with

a hard anxious eye. Finding that I was not harmful she put down her foot and glanced at the ground. Then she began pecking here and there slowly and sinuously, moving into the road, putting down her thin feet carefully, and looking closely at every speck on the stony, chalky ground. Every now and again she shot a keen glance up at me. I had nothing to offer her and she passed on and went towards the house. I saw her fly with a sudden shriek of determination over the low wall of the farm garden that rises abruptly uphill at the back of the house. If I felt better in health I should get so much pleasure out of the quiet movements of Nature around me, but as it is I am grumbling, grumbling because I have to sit useless, and when Maud comes back I shall go to greet her, a thin, haggard-looking woman. One thing I have made up my mind to do. If Aunt Dorothy wishes to keep Maud, she shall keep her. It has taken me all this time to see what I ought to have seen from the first, that I have no right to keep Maud with me. Maud might, if she liked, make life cheerful at No. 2, Brown Street. As to Stella, I should then be able to help her when she failed to make George's income do. After all, if I had had a stronger moral nature, I might have trained Stella into better ways. I am responsible for both girls. They had no other guide—and what have I done for them?"

"August 3.—Last night I dreamed that Maud suddenly came into my room and said: 'Oh,

Ursula, I could not stay any longer away from you!'

"Although I saw her, touched her, clasped her in my arms, I knew that 'something was wrong,' and behind my joy was a strange and secret anguish. Was that because for so long I have known deep in my heart that Maud *cannot* be happy with me? Why should she? I do not doubt that she loves me—but she needs husband and children—and I—to her—represent all that she most dreads in life—unfulfilled womanhood! The love of men has never come my way, this might have made me bitter and fanatical, but I have had to be a mother to Maud and Stella. I have had the cares of maternity and some of the joys, and I began those cares so early that I had no time to think. Now that I have time to think—my prime is past—and I can be content with little!

"Poor Maud, still in the strength of her youth and beauty, she wants to live!"

Here came a blank page in the manuscript. Maud looked up from the book for a moment and was conscious of the storm outside. The body of Ursula lay in the next room peacefully, as one sleeping her last sleep. No roaring of the wind and no cry for forgiveness from human lips could reach her in that far-off impenetrable region from which no traveller returns.

CHAPTER XX

"SEPTEMBER 20.—The strangest thing has happened to-day. I forced myself to walk—thinking perhaps that I was letting my 'will to be strong' falter. I went along the side of the rutty farm-path towards the cliff. I got nearly to the Newhaven Road and could go no farther—it is only about two or three hundred yards. I could see that a passing motor had come suddenly to a standstill on the road, and the chauffeur and another man were bending over the engine. Something had gone wrong. I put down my camp-stool and sat with my face towards them. As I did so one of the men lifted his head and looked round at me.

"Even now it seems impossible to be true! It was Lionel Kames!

"For a moment he did not know who I was. Was that because I had grown so thin? Then I saw that he recognised me, and straightening himself, he stared with those large brown eyes, and a sudden painful contraction of his face showed me something of what he had suffered since we last met.

"'Lionel!' I called out—but I could not move. I was too weary. He raised his hat stiffly and I was afraid he was going to turn away,

when his whole face changed and he came straight up to me.

"'Are you alone?' he asked. Oh, how glad I was to hear his voice again!

"'Quite alone,' I said, and I suppose it was my saying 'quite' that brought a strange fixed look into his eyes. He thought that I meant that Maud was married—or dead!

"I said hastily 'Maud is still abroad with Aunt Dorothy,' and I struggled up on my feet. The sudden shock of meeting him just when I was overcome by fatigue was too much for me. I thought the ground was moving. I touched his arm and felt him supporting me, encouraging me as if I was a child, in that old genial manner of his.

"By this time his chauffeur had got the engine to work—and Lionel called out to him to go a little way along the road and then come back and wait.

"After he had made me rest a few minutes he took me back to the house. He has altered. He looks older than he did eighteen months ago, but he looks also firmer in character, or do I think this because I know that it is true?

"I had not meant to speak about myself, but he drew everything from me—everything! In those few minutes, I emptied my heart of the burden of my illness and of my loneliness. I couldn't help it, the consolation of having him again was so great. When I reached this door I dreaded saying good-bye—but he did not leave me, he came in here to this shabby little

sitting-room. He looked at nothing, but saw everything—that is like him.

"All this time he had never mentioned Maud's name. I wanted to question him about himself, all I dared ask was whether he was living at Orpenden? 'A man must live somewhere,' he replied. Then seeing that I was hurt, he told me in a rapid monotone, as if to make what he said as impersonal as possible, that his headquarters were at Orpenden, but that he had spent a year going about to the different centres of labour in this country to learn at first hand what the conditions were. I suppose I remained standing because I was so much surprised. 'Labour,' Lionel interested in 'Labour'!

"'There are two questions, Ursula,' he said, 'that do now, and will in the future, absorb the world—labour and religion. Religion I leave to you.' Here he smiled in his old way. Then he told me that he was standing as candidate for his own Division at the coming by-election. How amazing!

"I did not know what to say—I was so full of thankfulness and pride in him. I am afraid I showed my emotion, for he moved away with a swift turn and said—as if he was talking of some one else—'An ordinary fool like myself may drift on through his thirties still dreaming that he is a boy—but it takes a damned fool to do that when he has passed forty.'

"How much lay behind that speech! It seemed to me splendid and pathetic.

"Then he turned round again and scolded me for not sitting down. He took off my hat and placed me on the sofa, telling me not to slide off it—it *is* very slippery. He seized that horrible striped wool antimacassar from the back and spread it over me, saying that it made a 'charming *négligée*.'

"Was I ever going to see him again? I could not ask the question! Why should he come and see a dull old maid?

"'I can see you haven't been to confession for a long time and are getting slack,' he said. 'I shall be obliged to come and see how you are behaving. No, I shan't tell you what day—I shall come upon you unawares—and shall probably catch you bathing the farm baby and saying that you are doing it for the sake of exercise——'

"I told him that there wasn't a farm baby. He said he was glad to hear it—and then he went, saying—'I shall come soon.'

"It is so unselfish, so forgiving of him after all that has happened. He looks like a worldling, and to those who don't understand him, perhaps he talks like one, but all the time he is full of human warmth and pity. And how strong he is, in spite of all that has been against him in his birth and training and the habits of a luxurious life—to pull himself together like this! And when he spoke about his chances at the Election, he was so frank and modest. He said that the seat was a pretty safe one and that if he was elected it wouldn't be any credit at all to him.

I should like to hear him speak—he would be very straight and to the point. He would be very amusing too!

"'Soon,' he said, but ought I to let him come, will it not open afresh the old wounds? I thought I had the strength to do without human love, and now that I have seen Lionel again I am counting the hours because each one brings me nearer to that 'soon'!"

"September 24.—The world seems different to-night. I look upon it with different eyes. Not that I am afraid, but that things have lost their old significance and for the moment all seems a blank. When it was moonlight, I often used to look out of my window at the light bare open sky stretching beyond the cliff's rim from which came an indistinct murmur of the sea, and I used to think of those words:

> "'Hark to the tolling of bells
> And the crying of the wind,
> The old spells time out of mind.'

These words to-night have no meaning for me. They express the melancholy of life—yes—and of human hope. Nothing is real to me now—but death!

"The moment before Lionel came into the room this morning, when I heard his step and his voice, I felt a thrilling pleasure, but when he entered I knew that 'something' was going to happen, something that I should fear! He flung himself down by me on the little narrow sofa and broke the news to me, gradually—to

help me. He told me he was going to take me a long drive—to London. Why to London? Then it came out. He was taking me to see a specialist. He had arranged it all, and the hour. I was amazed, confused, but I knew I had to go! I saw the necessity of it as soon as he put it before me. He fastened my gloves for me, making pretence that I was too stupid to do it myself—and he propped me up in the motor with cushions and made me put up my feet, so that I should feel fatigue as little as possible. I could not help thinking of that drive we had eighteen months ago—from Brighton to Orpenden. How different everything was now—

"That half-hour in the doctor's room was like a bad dream, a bad dream that stiffens in some extraordinary way into solid reality!

"Lionel led me away from that room—and in the motor he made me lean my head against his shoulder while he held my hand, whispering once or twice as to a sick child—'Poor old girl, poor Ursula! Be a brave girl.' I don't think I am afraid—only—I have got to say good-bye to him and to Maud.

"One thing I have made him promise, that he will not tell anybody. Maud is coming back next month, it is not necessary to let her know till she returns. What is the good of bringing her back earlier merely to watch me die?"

"October 12.—To please me, Lionel brought me to-day Emily Brontë's poem that she wrote the day before she died. She was conscious of

God within her mind and that gave her strength beyond the strength of man. I have no strength like hers. I am not conscious of God within. I remember Father Fitzherbert saying that even if it could be proved that Christ was a myth, and that the vision of St. Paul was only the reflection of his own thought, it would not shake his faith in the Incarnation of God in Humanity. But Fitzherbert is a wonderful man. God is not merely an object of his faith, but an absorbing passion. Like St. John of the Cross, he could wander in the desert, desiring no sacraments, having no further need for the human instruments of Divine Grace, preferring to die in solitude, alone with his God.

"As for me, there are moments when I seem to lose sight of God, and at these moments, if I did not believe that Christ had walked upon this earth nearly two thousand years ago, I think my heart would break.

"My moral courage has grown now that I know I shall soon be face to face with 'ultimate things,' and Lionel has become so much part of the little of life that is left to me that I ventured to tell him my thoughts.

"Thinking it all over to-night I am so thankful that I told him. He was deeply sympathetic. He thinks now that 'truth' will not be served by ignoring what is called the 'religious sense' any more than by ignoring what is called the 'artistic sense.' He told me of a man, high in the world of learning, who is fully convinced that you have only to educate people to make

them 'prefer' an ethical lecture to a religious ceremony. 'You may as well believe,' said Lionel, 'that you have only to educate people, and you will get them to "prefer" a bath to breakfast, or to "prefer" an ordnance map to a water-colour by Turner. Bless you, they want both. Why ignore the complexity of the human mind or the needs of the human heart? Even if we can trace every instinct and every emotion in the twentieth century to the effort of some organic cell lying in a ditch to split itself in two, that's only the history of the thing. That isn't a solution of the problem "How"? That an organic cell should be able to split in two and become two cells, each as complicated as the first one, is what stumps me. To a plain man like myself it isn't an answer to say "mechanism," because it's more like "mechanic and mechanism all under the same hat."'

"He spoke all this in his usual tone, but, dropping his voice, he added slowly and so sadly—'What I have gone through lately has made me less cocksure than I was—because it has taken all the bounce out of me, Ursula. All I am certain of now is that I am an ignorant fool.'

"Till this moment he had never even alluded to the past. I knew that only some deep emotion could have made him speak of it. It brought us so much nearer together, that when he went away, I felt as if half my heart had gone with him. But I am happier than I have been before. I feel that our friendship is deeper

than it was. I know now that his thoughts will follow me when I pass through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Oh, I wish I could do something for him, serve him in some way, before I die. I can't bear to think of him going about unsatisfied. I know he is filling his life with work and interests, but all the time his heart aches."

"October 22.—The nurse has come. Lionel was right to insist on it. She is a great comfort to me. I need assistance now. I am so much weaker. That Lionel should have taken all the trouble off my hands—about getting her—is so wonderfully kind—and just at the moment of the election when he is very busy.

"I can see by Maud's letters that it is not her fault that they have again put off their return. Nurse thinks I ought to summon her back—but she does not understand. It would be sheer selfishness to do that. Maud will come soon—very soon."

"October 24.—I am full of gratitude. Lionel has got in with a large majority. He found time to come down here in order to tell me himself. May God bless him and his future career, that is my prayer to-day."

"November 1.—A fear has come upon me now that I am not able to leave my bed, that Maud will come too late for me to be able to tell her all that Lionel has been to me. She ought to

know. It might make a difference! Also if she saw him now, might it not open her eyes to his real value? They must meet—it is the cry of my heart! Her life would be safe in his hands, and surely she, seeing all the depth of kindness in his heart, would learn to forget his faults. God knows we all have faults. I shall have no peace now till she comes. Yesterday I wrote to ask her what day she returns."

"November 11.—Lionel found out that Father Fitzherbert was lecturing in Brighton this week. He went to see him and brought him here this morning. They came into my room together. It seemed a strange thing seeing them together—it was like a dream. Then Lionel went away and left us.

"If I had any sad thoughts about death before they have all gone now. I am conscious of nothing but the strange privilege of existence —the mystery of our birth is as great as the mystery of our death—it is enough that I am part of the Whole—one of the many that have emerged from that One and to which I return with the experiences of my life within me. Loneliness seems now an illusion.

"I find that Lionel had ordered nurse to wire to Maud, only that I was to be told. I give my consent that a wire shall be sent to-morrow if Maud herself does not wire that she is crossing. But I have a strange feeling that she will come.

"The wind wails a little to-night and I heard the sea-gulls screaming over the house at sunset."

"November 13 (afternoon).—The wire came at midday. Maud is on her way. She thinks I can come up to town and stay with them as soon as Aunt Dorothy has rested! She will know, poor girl, to-morrow by the first post, that I shall never move from this bed again. She will come to me at once. Nurse has looked out the trains—she may be here by eleven. Although I know that I may live for many days I feel as if the time was short. I think my anxiety that my two dear ones shall meet, makes me nervous."

"November 13 (evening).—God in His goodness has spared me all physical pain—only weakness. I shall put down my pen soon and not take it up again. To-morrow she will be here and I shall have no need to write. I shall see her face to face and speak all that is in my heart."

The shaking handwriting ended there, the rest of the book was blank.

Maud sat with the book on her knees, again listening to the storm outside. It had spent the worst of its fury and now the rain was coming down and beating in the chimney, hissing among the smouldering ashes. Then she fell asleep from sheer exhaustion, in the grey dawn.

Maud's sleep was full of the sound of wind and the sharp sting of the rain. She thought that she was awakened suddenly by some fresh, sharp, urgent call breaking in upon the noise of

the elements. She thought that she got up from her chair, her limbs stiff and numbed with cold and saw that the curtains were drawn aside and the window wide open. Through it she could see a great wide space stretching before her to the horizon, and on the horizon a crimson sun was rising in great flames, bathing all the earth and skies in glory.

The strange noise came again, it was a voice full of exultation calling to her—and now she could hear what it said :

" The last day has come, arise and meet your Lord and His saints ! "

Maud stood, stunned by the stupendous news. Then an overwhelming joy came over her. So the wretched problem of life was solved, the crooked was to be made straight and all tears were to be wiped away.

The voice called again, but this time the words were indistinct and she saw through the window a change coming over the landscape, the colour swiftly fading from the great stretch of earth and sky, and with a groan, Maud turned and saw the ashes lying in the grate and that she was not standing, but sitting stiff and numbed in the chair in which she had slept. No open window was to be seen, but through the faded curtains daylight was peering. Maud rose to her feet and pulled the curtains aside. There lay between her and a cold sea-line the sodden stubble and the narrow deeply rutted road over which she had stumbled last night.

She felt dazed by the bitter disappointment—

she was back again with the old problem of life unsolved and the bitter sorrow of night no less bitter in the grey light of a new morning.

Some one was knocking loudly at her door. She now knew that some one had been knocking several times.

She called "Come in," faintly.

The nurse came into the room. "Oh, Miss, have you been up all night?" she asked aghast.

"Do you want me?" asked Maud simply. For a brief second she wondered—"Has she come to say that Ursula is alive?"

No—those tidings would never come to Maud again on this earth.

"Father Fitzherbert," said the nurse, "is asking to see you—he is downstairs in the sitting-room."

CHAPTER XXI

He was there in Ursula's shabby little sitting-room, seated by a dismal newly-lighted fire. The same austere, commanding presence that Maud had never forgotten, and this time no phantom of her brain such as she conjured up in that unhappy afternoon at Brown Street eighteen months ago, no phantom, but Fitzherbert himself.

Memory often plays us false when our sentiment has been roused by some brief encounter in the past, and we meet the person again only to find to our disappointment that the heroic stature we remembered has dwindled in the light of fact down to normal proportions. But when Fitzherbert rose and came to meet her, Maud experienced, not disappointment in him, but a heightened impression of force and personality. Did he recognise her ?

Different as she looked now, with her hair untidy, her face flushed with fatigue and Ursula's dressing-gown wrapped loosely around her, from the well-dressed, self-possessed young woman, much occupied with the failings of other people, whom he had met before, Maud saw that he remembered her. She saw that behind those grey eyes the brain was piecing together separate links in a chain of circumstances that he now

had at his command. She closed the door behind her.

"Father Fitzherbert," she said, and stood where she was without offering her hand. "I came too late!"

He was close to her now.

"You came too late," he repeated quietly. "But you must not let that distress you."

"Yes," said Maud hurriedly, for she felt a sudden faintness with the strain of the meeting, and she was afraid she might not have the strength to finish what she wanted to say. "It was my own fault! I behaved selfishly to her up to the very end. I have never all my life done anything I ought to until I was driven to doing it, and then it has always been too late."

"Are you sure that this is not the self-accusation of a mind full of distress and a body that is exhausted?"

Maud trembled from head to foot, and she clung to the arms that he put out to her for her support.

Something in the fatherhood of his grasp unloosened the pent-up anguish of her heart, and Maud gave way at last to bitter weeping that for a few minutes left her without power to speak. How it came about she did not know, but when at last she was able to articulate she found herself at his knees, pouring out to him everything without restraint, everything that had burdened her conscience and destroyed her peace, everything even to the meanest fears of

her girlhood, of her womanhood, all the stirrings of a weak and passionate heart for personal happiness, and the inevitable failure to find it.

And he, seated on that great shabby chair where Ursula had watched the daylight sink into night through so many a lonely week, he listened with the patience of one whose daily practice it is to minister to the lives of others. When at last Maud drooped her face upon the hot hands she had clasped round his knees when she sank into exhausted silence, he raised her from the floor and made her sit in his chair.

She lay back, watching him with heavy-eyed attention, waiting for his directions. He walked to the window and looked out at the long stretch of sodden stubble lying beyond the little gate. The wind still broke against the house, but its fury was over; the heavy sky was beginning to break up into great tattered masses; the rain was no longer heavy, it was coming down fitfully and the window-panes had finer drops on them.

He walked back to the chair where she sat and stood in front of her, looking down at her.

"You have suffered yourself," he said, "and you have made others suffer. That is past, but let me tell you that you have more suffering in front of you."

"I know!" she said.

"The past is past, your duty lies with the future—that is all that belongs to you. It is about the future that I want to speak to you." He spoke in a low voice and very calmly.

"First of all I have to tell you what will be a shock to you, but what it is necessary for you to know. The man who was so dear to your sister is now lying only half conscious at his hotel. He does not know that your sister has passed away."

"He's not dead?" Maud's face became colourless.

"Don't move," said Fitzherbert; "sit still and listen. You have been weak in the past; gather yourself together and be strong now—show yourself a woman of courage. You can and you must."

She sat still and silent, watching the words as they left his lips.

"Yesterday," he went on, "he was thrown out of his motor and got some injury to his spine. He was on his way here. The doctors put him under morphia during most of yesterday. I saw the nurses; I went to Princes Hotel before I came here. It is hoped that the injuries will not permanently affect him, but he has to be kept absolutely quiet, not only in body but in mind. He was to have gone back to Orpenden last evening to speak at a meeting. If he recovers, it will be some days, perhaps weeks, before he can take up his duties to his constituency. All is being done that can be done for him—all that wealth can do." He emphasised the word "wealth."

Maud put her hands over her face. She could not bear the look in Fitzherbert's eyes. She saw in them a reproach that she deserved.

Poor Lionel, he had all that wealth can give—wealth cannot command love. Wealth attracts the parasites only. She had been a parasite! Poor Lionel!

"I can see," he said, "that you are full of a passion of pity. Great heroic things in this world are often done in a passion of pity, but still greater deeds are done by that far rarer passion, the passion for justice. When it comes to the treadmill of daily duty, when it comes to the monotonous small warfare against our lower nature which makes up life, passions carry us but a little way—nothing lasts out the fret and wear of soul and body but the love of our fellow-men and the sober determination to subordinate self. This, mind you, is a religion for strong men. You, just now, full of this passion of pity, are picturing your old lover lying on his bed as helpless as a child, and as long as he is dangerously ill you will forget to criticise him or blame him for the lack of spirituality, which lack you acknowledge that you share. But when he is well again—supposing that he recovers—how will you feel then? I seem to speak harshly, but I am merely speaking what you in your heart know to be true."

Yes, he was not speaking more harshly than she deserved.

"You mean that I mustn't even ask him for his forgiveness?" she said.

"Yes, I mean that. Are you willing to rake up his emotions merely in order to get the sensation of being forgiven? You can't want

that—you can't want that now. That is not justice to him."

Maud dropped her eyes.

"And I mustn't even thank him for all he has done for Ursula?" she said.

"It is not necessary," said Fitzherbert.

"You think he won't care," she demanded, gazing up at her confessor again with her reddened eyes full of anxiety.

"I think he will care," he replied. "I think that any interview under any pretext will do him harm. He is accustoming himself to life without you and is behaving like a strong, sensible man; do you propose to disturb him?"

"He will never know how grateful I am and how I honour him for his goodness to Ursula?"

"No," said Fitzherbert. "He won't know, but does that matter? He brightened the last days of your sister's life; he knows that *she* was grateful."

Maud found her way blocked. She had cut herself off from Lionel's life and now she was forbidden to return even as a humble friend.

"He will think that I don't appreciate all that he did for Ursula," she said miserably. "He will think I am even meaner than I am."

"If you follow the conventions of social life," he said, "you will get Lady Dorothy to write to him in her own name, yours and your sister, Mrs. Broughton's, thanking him for all that he has done. He will know that you are all grateful—that's as it should be."

Maud's eyes fell again. He was protecting Lionel. He was standing guard over him, he was carefully closing every door of access to him. He was right. A man like Fitzherbert, who is living in the lives of others, is likely to be right.

"You have an opportunity now," said Fitzherbert, "of showing that you are going to act unselfishly. The truth is that Major Kames lies between life and death. If he dies, you will have the profound consolation of knowing that you, at the last, considered him instead of considering yourself."

Maud's lips assented. Her thoughts flew to the Princes Hotel. Was he really dying?

"Then you will go back," said Fitzherbert, "to Lady Dorothy as soon as you have done all that can be done to reverence the body of her who was to you as a second mother. You will go back and undertake your new duties cheerfully and not waste your time or wear out your brain with profitless regrets. To do that would be not retrieving the past but repeating it. Do you understand?"

He moved away from her and walked again to the window. "Miss Monckton, I must be going; the rain has stopped. I can walk to Rottingdean and catch the motor bus. I have time to catch the one that starts at half-past nine."

Maud had been following him with her eyes. She had been so wholly absorbed in her own troubles that she had not noticed till now that the skirt of his cassock below the knee was damp;

she also noticed that there was a leathern case lying on the table. He had come so early this morning in order to give her the sacrament if she wished it—and then he had found that she was not prepared to receive it, perhaps did not care to receive it, and now he was preparing to go away—just as he was—fasting. Maud started up from her chair, full of remorse.

"You can't go fasting and with your cassock not yet dry. Oh, Father Fitzherbert, I have been neglecting you. You mustn't go till you have had breakfast."

"My cassock is scarcely wet at all," he said; "I made my cabman drive me over the stubble almost to the gate." But she would not listen.

"It is wet," said Maud, "and the kindest thing you can do is to stay and let me give you breakfast. You must eat somewhere—it will not delay you—it shall be here in a few minutes."

Maud's tone of submission had changed into one of command; the signs of physical fatigue in her face and in her movements vanished. He was no longer her confessor, he was simply a helpless man who needed looking after. Before he could take it from her, she caught up the poker and stirred the fire. It had burnt up now and it burst into a blaze, roaring up the chimney. It was surprising how soon he collapsed into obedience. She made him sit in the large chair and gave it a push towards the fire as if he had been a child sitting in it, only that, weighted with his six feet of solid structure it would not move. To please her,

he jerked the chair forward and put his feet upon the fender. Then she bade him remain where he was till she returned, and she went out of the room closing the door behind her with the manner of one who wishes to shut some unreliable person safely within. She crossed the little oil-clothed passage and pushed open a door. It led into the farm parlour. She found there the farmer's wife and her niece, and she begged them to get breakfast immediately. But they were already preparing it and became full of sympathetic haste at the sight of her.

"We didn't know, Miss, quite when you would want it," and the old woman hurried into the kitchen.

Maud went back to the hall and climbed that frail, creaking staircase with its shaky rail. She had to pass Ursula's door. That door stood out of the wall, slight and shabby and yet cruelly conspicuous and significant. Maud passed it heavily and turned into her own room. She bathed her eyes and made a hasty toilet. She dressed rapidly, conscious all the time she did so that it had been Ursula who had taught her how to be rapid and methodical in dressing as in everything else of a practical nature. Whatever there was in her that was good—so Maud said to herself—had been created by Ursula; whatever there was of bad belonged to her own nature. And now Ursula was gone, and the one other being in the world who really cared for her and whom Ursula had loved was

possibly at this moment slipping out of life. For all that she knew she might be absolutely alone—except for Aunt Dorothy. But Maud dared herself to cry again. Ah, she must not. She ought not to have cried so much with Fitzherbert; it must have been very trying for him. She must go down quietly and give him breakfast, and speak and act calmly so that he could eat in peace.

In less than a quarter of an hour from the time she had left it, Maud entered the sitting room, still red-eyed and weary-looking, but quiet and self-possessed and alert.

Breakfast was already laid, and while the coffee and dishes were being fetched Maud went round to the fire. "Don't get up," she said almost imperiously to Fitzherbert. "Is your cassock dry? That is all I want to know."

Yes, it was dry, he said.

Maud bent down and felt it with her hand.

"You don't take my word for it?" questioned Fitzherbert, submitting to having his cassock handled by her.

"It isn't quite dry," she said. "Why did you say it was dry?"

"It seems dry," he said. "Besides, the matter is a trifling one."

"Things don't seem dry if they are damp," said Maud rather faintly. She was standing up now and she looked down at his face reproachfully. She was vexed to think that all this splendid manly moral strength and helpfulness, all this keen intelligence was lodged in a body

that was so unprotected and so uncared for. Why, if he went on like this he might be taken ill and die any day.

He smiled. That smile made it worse. It showed that he was hopeless. She did not return the smile. She shook her head. Unfortunately she could not do with him as she liked, there were conventions in the way, but she meant to do as much as she dared. So, after seeing him seated at the table, she took the large striped woollen antimacassar that had been used for Ursula and laid it over his knees, saying:

"Even if you are angry, please let me have my way—I am hostess."

This time he laughed and allowed the barbaric covering to remain where she placed it, and she, rejoicing that he was submissive, smiled for the first time and sat down opposite to him. They took their breakfast at first in silence, but afterwards he talked about Ursula, telling Maud that she had spoken about being buried in the little church down in the hollow behind the farm. Maud had already gathered this from the nurse, and last night she had written to the Vicar. Fitzherbert asked if there was anything he could do for her in Brighton, but there was nothing; Maud had either made the arrangement or was going to do so that morning—by the evening she expected her Aunt Dorothy and Stella. There would be no room for them in the farm, but they would put up at Rottingdean.

Maud went out with him into the little hall to see him put on his cloak. She helped him

on with it in silence. A large shabby umbrella stood near the door with a hat balanced on it. It was his umbrella and his hat. He had put his leathern case under his arm, and now good-bye must be said. He held out his hand to Maud.

Were they never to meet again? Was he to go away knowing what no one else knew of her intimate thoughts and never speak with her again, never trace any further the history of her life?

What his life was, what his thoughts were, was as far from her knowledge now as they had been when she first saw him standing in the vestry of that church in London.

"You will probably see it in the papers," he said, "but if you like I will let you know how Major Kames goes on. Would you like me to do that?"

This man standing guard over Lionel and forbidding her to see him or communicate with him, at least did not want her to suffer more than was necessary. He was her friend as well as Lionel's.

She looked up at him and spoke impulsively. "I want to know more than anything else in the world!"

She felt a sort of dull amazement at her own emotion and stood confused and silent while he gazed intently down at her.

"I will write to you then," he said, "I shall be in Brighton till Monday, as I am preaching on Sunday. So, Miss Monckton, you leave everything absolutely in my hands?"

"Yes," she said, "if you will not forsake me altogether because you despise me."

"I don't despise you," he said, "but I want you to tread the narrow path. I want you to do your duty—you know as well as I that outside the path of duty there is no peace for a man's soul."

"Yes, I know," said Maud, "and no peace inside—alas!"

"There is—and you will find it," said Fitzherbert. "But it doesn't come all at once."

"You know," said Maud a little tearfully.

"I do know," he said. "Trust me, and good-bye; God be with you."

He squeezed her hand very tightly, and then he put on his hat, seized his umbrella and pulled the door open. He raised his hat and went out, shutting the door heavily behind him.

CHAPTER XXII

THE events of the next two days passed with a strange unreality. What stood out most definitely to Maud was the solitary evening she spent on that first day when she tore page by page of Ursula's diary and burnt it at the fire, heart-sick as she did so. Ursula would not have wished it to be kept. Then letters came by the morning and afternoon posts, and among the letters that arrived none came from Father Fitzherbert. There was a good deal to be done. The Vicar had come to see her at once and was eager to do anything that he could. He even went to the Brighton station to meet Lady Dorothy and Stella and take them to their room at Rottingdean.

Most of the arrangements had to be made at once—before their arrival. However, when they did arrive Maud found that they had no views of their own and had taken for granted that she would decide everything, and that they were prepared to be satisfied with her arrangements.

"You will come back with me?" was indeed what was uppermost in Lady Dorothy's mind, and she was unable to suppress the question, though she asked it in a tone that implied that

there could be no question about it. The funeral was to be on Saturday morning, and Maud begged to be allowed to stay on by herself at the farm till the late afternoon of that day. Lady Dorothy made no difficulty; she and Stella would go back together. All she wanted was the certainty of being in sole possession of Maud—that certainty filled up the vacancy of her life and gave her courage. She was sincerely sorry about Ursula, and shocked and rather remorseful at the thought that there had been no member of the family to minister to her last wants.

As to Stella, it was her first experience of death and she was overwhelmed by it. After all, Ursula had been the only mother that she had known, and she walked over from Rottingdean to see the room which Ursula had used and to see her step-sister's body lying peacefully in the coffin, with a pain at the heart that she had never felt in her life before.

In looking over and in packing Ursula's things Maud had found Ursula's will. She had opened and read it to see if it gave any directions about the funeral. There were none except what Maud knew already, that the grave was to be in the churchyard in the hollow of the Downs behind the farm.

The will was very short and simple, and Maud saw that she was made sole executor, that half the capital was to be in her trust on Stella's behalf, and that the other half was to be hers, Maud's, absolutely.

In order that Stella should feel that Maud was not leaning on her rights as executrix, she brought the will down into the sitting-room and gave it to Stella to read and then went out of the room as she could not bear to see the paper being unfolded.

When she returned she found Stella huddled in the great chair, crying bitterly.

"Stella!" said Maud, for she had never known her sister cry like this before, not even when she took her upstairs to the door of Ursula's room.

Stella got out of the chair, came to Maud and flung herself on her neck.

"Ursula was so just," was all she could articulate. "She didn't want to—but she thought it was right." Maud understood.

George Broughton came down to the funeral. He arrived on Friday night, and early on Saturday morning the four mourners, followed by the farm people and the nurse, walked behind the coffin, which was carried by the footpath over the ridge of down into the tiny churchyard.

There were no traces left of the recent storm except that they could hear the sound of the sea distinctly as they walked in silence. At the ridge of down overlooking the dean there lay, suddenly discovered by the eye, the little grey church with its squat spire, a small grey vicarage in a clump of trees, and a cluster of labourers' cottages straggling down to a narrow, sluggish, chalky brook at the bottom. Beyond that lay a valley, unseen, and a shoulder of down blocking

the view to the horizon. The sky was a clear blue, with heavy clouds drifting low towards the north.

The coffin-bearers and mourners descended the dean, sheltered here from the keen but gentle breeze that came up from the sea. The sun was almost hot on their heads as they moved slowly towards the church. The tiny grey church with its little grey churchyard looked so much the "home" of all true lovers of the Downs that Maud felt a momentary comfort in her heart.

They saw the coffin lowered and the earth thrown upon it. They laid flowers round the spot, and they all went away, except Maud. She went into the church for a moment and looked round it. Ursula must have looked at these short, stout, homely Norman pillars, and at the little altar under that deep rose window. She must have—until she became too ill to get as far—she may have looked, as Maud did at that moment, through the rounded southern door out to the sunshine lying on the mounds of turf outside. Maud walked back to the farm and sat in Ursula's room till she knew that the grave must be covered in and the dead left in peace, and the churchyard empty of living intruders. It was early in the afternoon when she went back again to the churchyard. The sun was beginning to settle down in the west, it was already deepening to a clear delicate orange and gilding the grey walls of the church. The tombstones were also gilded and the white

flowers on Ursula's grave were tinged with the faintest yellow.

Maud rearranged the flowers herself. There would be now until the end of her life something about that small spot in the churchyard that was personal, something familiar and yet inexplicably strange, because death is strange. That spot held part of her own past, a past that was gone from her and yet in some obscure form of memory there—lying at her feet.

Maud lingered on till the sun sank below the ridge of down into the southern sea and the sky became flushed with crimson. Then the air grew colder, and the church and the graves became a little dim. A cypress close to Ursula's grave was trembling in all its leaves, and at the western horizon against the crimson sky Maud could see when she looked up a little clump of withered trees with their branches moving restlessly. The dark rampart of clouds that had perpetually drifted at the northern horizon were still there, still drifting, and yet as they drifted being replaced by new clouds that seemed to come up from below in never-ending procession. The crimson gradually paled into rose pink, and the rampart of drifting clouds and the clump of withered trees darkened. So did the cypress close at hand, and the light paled on the church and the stones at the head of the scattered graves. Maud bent over her sister's grave for a last farewell, and then resolutely turned her face to the south. As she climbed the narrow footpath she turned and looked back at the church,

the churchyard, and the village houses behind them. A faint mist from the bottom of the dean was creeping over them—it had not yet reached the church and churchyard. But darkness was settling on the whole valley—the cypress close to Ursula's grave had turned black and looked as if it were standing motionless. Maud gazed at the west, and it was as if some superhuman artist hand had stippled all the pink sky with black and had turned it into a marvellous, melancholy amethyst. The little clump of withered trees on the long, smooth ridge was as black as the cypress there below. A cold gust of wind met her as she reached the top of the down. She turned once again and looked down. All behind her lay in obscurity; all outlines had disappeared; nothing remained but a great empty abyss of mist, in the chilly heart of which she knew lay Ursula's grave.

She hurried along towards the farmhouse, which was standing plainly against the clear twilit sky. As she got nearer, nearer yet, a star came out over the sea, minute, bright and steady.

The old farmer and a farm lad were waiting at the gate for her. They were already loading a small cart with things that had belonged to Ursula and that Maud had packed. They told her that below, on the Newhaven road, a taxi was waiting to take her to the station. It had come punctually to time. It was past five o'clock.

Maud went into the house for a moment to

say good-bye to the farmer's wife, and a letter was handed to her. It had come by the afternoon's post. The writing was a man's. It was the letter that she had been waiting for at every post. It had come at last. A sense of suffocation seized Maud as she took it into her hand. She had to compel herself to show no emotion.

With the letter in her hand she walked into the sitting-room. It was almost dark there; only the light of the fire enabled her to see. All Ursula's own possessions had gone, but there was the great chair, the narrow, hard sofa with its striped woollen antimacassar and the little table in the middle. The three people who had been most significant to her in her life had all been in this room, and in this room Maud prayed for strength to bear what the letter might contain, and into the prayer she put Ursula's name; it came naturally—both the prayer and name. Maud did not doubt that whatever there was of Eternal and Ultimate, Ursula had always been and would now be a part of it. Then she went out of the room and closed the door gently behind her, the letter still unopened.

She bade a brief good-bye to the farm people, and then went out into the cold night air. It was almost dark. She followed the lumbering cart, steeling her heart against self-pity and forcing herself into an attitude of resignation. She gave directions to the driver of the cart about the luggage and went to the door of the taxi. The chauffeur asked for a direction.

"The Brighton station," she said, and she got into the taxi and shut the door after her.

The farmhouse was not visible—it was merged into the darkness of the approaching night.

She felt the car move. Then she broke open the letter, and making herself deaf to the inward clamour of her heart she read the lines by the light of the lamp:

"DEAR MISS MONCKTON,

"The doctors are satisfied with his progress. If you have anything you want to say to me, write.

"Yours sincerely,

"JAMES FITZHERBERT."

"Thank God!" was all she could say. She pulled the window of the car down and leaned out to speak to the chauffeur, who slackened immediately. "Go to Hove station instead of the Brighton station," she said, "and as soon as you can, get on to the old coast road and go all along the front till you have to turn up to the Hove station."

She left the window quite down and breathed in the fresh cold air in deep draughts. Then she read the letter over and over again. There was hope—hope for him—hope!

She could not lean back; all her muscles were tightened and her nerves were strung up; her thoughts worked at high pressure. She watched the lights as she glided past them. She felt the car turn abruptly down towards the

sea, and very soon they were on the parade in front of Sussex Square. She peered keenly at the windows of their old lodgings as she passed—lodgings where so much had happened. There were lights in their windows! Alas, alas, no Ursula there—*that* dimmed the joy—that memory must always dim her joy. Once she put her head out of the window and looked at the sea. It was making a fretful sound, dragging at the steep shingled beach and before her lay miles of curving lights stretching away to Hove and then dimly on to the ancient basin of Aldington and on to the harbour of Portslade. She drew in her head and sat back in her corner. They passed the first pier, crowded with lights; then, as they went on, they passed the last pier; it was almost in darkness. They reached Hove and now Maud closed the window towards the sea and opened the other window, and sitting close at it, watched for Princes Hotel. Was his room facing the sea? Which of the lighted windows would be his? Here was the hotel—full of lights—which was his? The car sped past the hotel. It was gone and Maud sank back into her corner. Did he know that Ursula had passed away? Was he well enough, strong enough to be told any news? Was he being nursed well enough? Would they keep him quiet enough? Would they really save him every shock, every unnecessary emotion? Oh, she would not trust them! They might do something foolish, something neglectful and he would perhaps suffer for it for the rest of his life!

London was so far from Hove. She had never thought of that before; it was cruelly far off! Supposing he had a relapse, if such a thing was possible in his case—suppose he were to die after all—or suppose he was never to become really well? But Fitzherbert had said that the doctors were satisfied; that sounded as if he might recover completely—if only he was being nursed properly! He was having done for him all that wealth could do. There was a sting in those words of Fitzherbert's. Love can do so much more than wealth, and Lionel had no one watching over him who loved him. A hired nurse might omit something important—she wouldn't see all that was wanted with the thousand eyes of love; she would not think with the subtle ingenuity of love of all the possible ways of averting danger! It was Maud's own fault that he was there alone with only nurses. If she had been able to love him she would have been there looking after him; if she had understood all that was best in him, instead of seeing only his faults, she would have been there watching over him!

The taxi turned inland and in a few minutes it stood at the Hove railway station. Maud got out slowly; the porter told her that she had only three minutes to spare, but she did not hasten. She bought her ticket and got into the train just as it was starting.

She sat back in her corner and began to think again. How could she ever make Lionel respect her again? He had trusted her, and

then found she wasn't to be trusted! There came back to her a vivid picture of that last afternoon at Brown Street. She saw again the look that Lionel had given her when he was standing in the middle of the drawing-room. She remembered the exact tone in which he had told her that he was going to sing something for her alone that the others would not understand. Then that song—that hymn.

Now she understood his profound sympathy, his keen desire to read the world with her eyes. Simply for her sake he was trying to think with her thoughts.

If Ursula had heard that song—sung as he sang it—she would have known at once the love that lay behind it. And with these thoughts crowding into her brain Maud drifted farther and farther into the darkness, away from the man who was lying so still in his room at the Princes Hotel. Fitzherbert had said, "Write, if you have anything to say!" Anything to say?

Maud found pencil and paper and began to write. When she got home she would copy it out in ink and have it posted at once. It would reach Father Fitzherbert at Brighton on Sunday morning.

What she wrote was:

"Dear Father Fitzherbert,

"Thank God for your news but you send me no details, and I am still so anxious.

"Yours sincerely,

"Maud Monckton."

CHAPTER XXIII

For the time being Stella's domestic troubles seemed to be providentially lightened. She was so much softened by her grief at Ursula's death and so grateful to the memory of the dead that—for the first time in her life—she felt passionately eager to give somebody pleasure.

A brilliant idea occurred to her. It was so brilliant and so obvious that she wondered whether Maud might not think of it too and forestall her. In order to make this impossible she put her idea into objective reality with no delay, and about a week after their return from Rottingdean Stella arrived at No. 2, Brown Street, looking very handsome and mysterious in her black hat and veil and carrying with some innocent ostentation, under her arm, a small basket.

With the insight born of much previous suffering, Jackson perceived that the basket contained a future menace to the peace of the household above and below stairs.

Stella said, "Is Miss Maud at home?" and her two dimples were very deeply set in her cheeks as she asked the question.

Yes, Miss Maud was at home.

At this Stella walked right into the hall, basket under arm, and spoke softly. "I will

run up to her room then," she said to Jackson, "and please tell her that I'm there waiting for her." Stella's blue eyes were sparkling and her earrings swaying and her dimples were hard set as she ran upstairs without stopping till she got to Maud's bedroom. There she knocked, and receiving no answer she burst in with all haste.

Jackson, with his figure stiff and his eyes stiff and even his hair unsympathetically stiff, went in search of Maud, found her and gave her the hated information in a voice of malignant resignation. It was a voice that portended evil and Maud, struck by the tone of it, hurried upstairs. When she reached her room and opened the door she found Stella seated in the middle of the floor, holding a small brown Pekinese dog by a leash. The basket in which it had been brought was tossed to one corner of the room.

"Stella!" exclaimed Maud.

"Well?" said Stella, smiling hard under her black hat. "Well?"

"Is it yours?" asked Maud, with her eyebrows raised.

"Now is it likely?" said Stella. "You know I hate household pets, whether they are cats or dogs. I can't abide them." She laughed and snapped her fingers at the Pekinese.

"Then what are you going to do with it?"

Maud knew perfectly well what she was going to do, but she was amazed. Another Kiddie! Stella might at least have consulted her wishes in the matter; after all she would be

very deeply involved if there was to be another Kiddie!

"It's my present to Aunt Dorothy," said Stella. "She will never have the courage to buy one herself and yet I know she simply longs for one."

"I think you might have told me," said Maud.

"I thought it would be a lovely surprise," said Stella, rather disappointed.

"It is not a surprise, it's a shock," said Maud.

The small brown-and-black face stared up at her with its bulging eyes and sniffed into the air.

"You won't suffer, Maud, old girl; it's a silent kind," said Stella. "George says it'll be all right. He says it's just the very thing for Aunt Dorothy."

"Then Aunt Dorothy won't care for it," said Maud promptly; "you know that, Stella. She prefers a dog that is hysterical!"

"She will worship it," said Stella. "It's so sweet. Look at its absurd face—and it says nothing."

"That's the mischief—from her point of view." Maud knelt on the floor and took up the dog, who submitted calmly, and sitting on her arm it now stared hard at Stella and sniffed in her direction.

"It really isn't so bad," said Maud.

"I knew you'd love it," exclaimed Stella. "It's got a perfect character. Now I want you

to go and put it into Aunt Dorothy's arms, saying that it is a present from me—will you?"

Maud rose to her feet with the dog still on her arm.

"I wonder whether she'll mind," said Maud musingly.

"She simply aches for a dog," said Stella, "only she won't say so. I want you to put it in such a way that she'll feel forced to keep it. You'll do that better than I shall; if I give it to her I shall simply burst out laughing and that won't do." Stella got up from the floor. "Where is Aunt Dorothy?"

"She is in the writing-room," said Maud, still stroking the smooth small head. "It is very sweet."

"I knew you'd say so after you had really examined it," said Stella, shaking her earrings.

"Aunt Dorothy will corrupt its soul and send it eventually to hell. She won't be happy till she has trained it for the infernal regions," said Maud softly.

"Oh, to botheration with the infernal regions," said Stella. "She can't make it shriek like a Pom; it's not its nature."

"It'll acquire the power of shrieking then," said Maud.

"It'll get too fat, that's all," said Stella. "Come, Maud, I simply can't wait any longer. Let us go downstairs. I shall go into the dining-room and wait there till you come and tell me how the affair is going. I want Aunt Dorothy

to think I've gone, but you slip downstairs and speak to me."

The two sisters went downstairs together till they reached the drawing-room floor; then Stella ran lightly down to the dining-room and left Maud with the dog in her arms just outside the writing-room door. Lady Dorothy was sitting at the table, writing. She saw at a glance what Maud carried in her arms and she stared through her glasses.

"What's that?" she called out.

"Oh, a kind of dog," replied Maud, looking down at the animal as if she were not sure whether it mightn't be something else—a sort of a cat, perhaps.

"Take it away, my dear," said the old lady firmly.

"Take it where, Aunt Dorothy? It's a great nuisance, but Stella has left this as a present to you. It's bought and paid for. I suppose you will have it returned to Stella and you know the kind of stepmother she will be; she'll stuff it the first day and then leave it to starve. I wash my hands of it. I really can't be responsible for it." Maud placed the dog on the table, where it sat and stared hard at Lady Dorothy, sniffing towards her as was its nature to do.

Lady Dorothy looked intently at the dog through her glasses.

"We don't want a dog," said Maud. "I told Stella that, but it was too late; she'd got it. I wish she had consulted us beforehand.

Are you going to put it in the waste-paper basket or burn it ? "

The dog took a step nearer to Lady Dorothy and then moved carefully over the blotter and stepped down on to her lap—merely because it was the most obvious way of finally reaching the floor.

" Well, little orphan," said Maud, putting out her hand to stroke it, " shall we send you back to your stepmother or consign you to the fire ? "

Lady Dorothy's soul was full of conflicting emotions. A sense of the impropriety of allowing a new dog to sit on her lap battled with her desire to have a dog sitting on her lap—especially a very small dog.

Maud suddenly moved away. " I quite forgot that Stella has left the basket lying about and I am afraid it will be thrown away ; " and so saying she slipped out of the room and closed the door behind her. She ran upstairs to her room and found the basket. Then she ran downstairs and went into the dining-room. Stella was walking about the room impatiently.

" Well ? " she asked, her face full of excitement.

" It's sitting on her lap," said Maud. " I have told her that if it is returned to you you will forget about it and starve it. I think that has made an impression."

" It isn't true," said Stella indignantly. " But you know that I hate an animal in the house ; it's always wanting something and

it's always in the way. Do you think she'll keep it? Does she like it?"

"I have hopes," said Maud.

"Perhaps I had better go now," said Stella. "I don't want her to find me."

"Take the basket with you," said Maud. "That will help. I shall tell her that you took it away with you."

"Oh, what fun!" said Stella. "I do so long to know what happens." Stella took up the basket and went into the hall with Maud. When they reached the door she turned to her sister with an expression of keen curiosity in her face. "You don't see the paper George takes so I have brought it with me." Stella pulled a paper out of her muff and held it towards her sister. "There is something in it I have marked. How it is we have never seen anything before I don't know—it just happens like that sometimes. Don't forget to look."

Maud's face grew crimson. She took the paper silently. There was only one subject of thought in the world for Maud just now—only one subject in the "living" world.

"You've seen it already?" demanded Stella, blushing too at the sight of her sister's emotion.

"There is no relapse?" she questioned, startled out of her reserve.

"Relapse? No! He's getting better," said Stella as she stood gazing at Maud with her blue eyes getting more and more intense. "Why, do you care?"

Maud drew a long breath. If he was getting

better why had not Fitzherbert sent her fresh news? She looked away from Stella's face and said: "It was Major Kames who looked after Ursula all those last weeks."

Stella stood amazed. "Major Kames! How do you know, Maud?"

Maud turned away. "I know from some writing that Ursula left behind her and also I heard from the nurse. I was only waiting to tell Aunt Dorothy till I heard that Major Kames had recovered. I can't talk about it, Stella; it hurts me," and she walked to the foot of the stairs.

"I hadn't the faintest idea, or I wouldn't have spoken," said Stella.

"I know, I know," said Maud, and she began mounting the stairs. Stella opened the hall door and went out reluctantly. She was leaving behind so much that interested her. Anyhow, she had something of interest to startle George with when he came home. So Major Kames had looked after Ursula! Stella felt the cool November air keenly against her hot cheeks. After all, Major Kames must be a gentleman! What with the dog and with this sudden discovery about Major Kames, Stella had more to think about than her brain would hold. Suppose, after all, something came of it all. If Maud was repenting, something would come of it. It would be delightful to have a married sister at Orpenden who would ask her and George to come over continually. It would be very agreeable, and as to Aunt Dorothy, why, there

she was with a new dog—what more could she want? Stella almost bounded along in the faint autumnal sunshine.

Alone in her bedroom, Maud unfolded the paper and searched for Stella's mark. There it was. With a beating heart she looked at the short paragraph. It was very short and contained less information than she had hoped for: Major Kames was sufficiently recovered from his recent motor accident for the doctors to sanction his removal to Orpenden this week. That was all! Orpenden was nearer to town than Hove. Only thirty miles away! What did "sufficiently recovered" really mean? Did it mean that he was able to move, to read, to listen to conversation? What did it really mean? Her letter to Fitzherbert begging for more news had not yet been answered. She must write again—at the risk of displeasing him she must write.

A knock came on her door and she hastily put away the paper. Eugenie's face appeared. "Her ladyship wants you, Miss Maud."

Had Aunt Dorothy just seen a similar paragraph in the *Morning Post?*

Maud went downstairs, bracing herself up for the interview. She meant to be very calm, to say as little as possible and yet to say all that was necessary. She almost prayed that her aunt would show some reserve in her questions and in her remarks, and not say anything dreadful.

Maud opened the door. Her knees were a little shaky as she walked into the room; she

was painfully conscious that her face was flushed; her hands felt icy cold. Now the ordeal had to be gone through. Lady Dorothy had left the writing-table; she was now seated by the fire with the *Morning Post* spread upon her knee. Upon a hassock beside her and opposite to the fire lay the Pekinese in real or simulated slumber.

"Maud!" called out Lady Dorothy, without turning her head.

"Yes, Aunt Dorothy," said Maud faintly.

"Well, my dear, you'll never guess!" she said, still without turning her head.

"Not guess, Aunt Dorothy?" said Maud. "Perhaps——"

"Well, I'm going to keep him!"

"Keep him!" repeated Maud, confused for the flash of a moment.

"He can never take the place of my darling, but as Stella has paid for him I scarcely like to refuse him."

Maud laughed a little huskily.

"He's not bad, is he, Aunt Dorothy?" she said.

"He's too placid," said Lady Dorothy; "but in spite of that I think he is intelligent, and we might take him out with us and try him. We can drive to the Park and then just walk him about a little and see how he follows."

"He must be kept on the leash," said Maud, "for a few days."

"Perhaps it would be safer," said Lady Dorothy. "What is his name, Maud?"

Maud had never thought of asking.

"I really don't know," she said. "Hadn't you better give him one and accustom him to it from the very beginning? I suppose it must be something with a Chinese ring about it. I can't think of anything but Souchong and Orange Pekoe!"

For a moment there was a silence in the room, and then Lady Dorothy spoke musingly.

"I shall call him Pic-ca-noo-noo," she said.

"What does that mean?" asked Maud.

"I don't know," said Lady Dorothy.

Maud was careful all that morning and indeed all the rest of the day to take no notice of the dog so as to allow him to fall into the habit of considering Lady Dorothy as his sole and particular friend. He fell into the empty niche of Kiddie with remarkable ease, making no objection to sharing Lady Dorothy's siesta after lunch. He curled himself up before the fire as if he had always acted as her companion on these occasions.

Maud had an interview with Jackson before the tea was brought into the drawing-room.

"Jackson!" she said, "don't bring up Kiddie's tea-cup; Pic-ca-noo-noo can drink out of an ordinary cup."

"The ordinary cups aren't shallow enough, Miss," said Jackson, with a weary loathing of the name Pic-ca-noo-noo.

"Never mind. Let her ladyship settle the matter herself. You know, Jackson, you'll get quite reconciled to Pic-ca-noo-noo," said Maud,

pronouncing the name very emphatically. "He's an immense moral improvement on poor Kiddie. You'll get to love Pic-ca-noo-noo, Jackson."

Jackson bridled at the word "love." "I'm sure I hope he'll continue to be an improvement, Miss," was all he would admit and he did so gloomily.

"Well!" said Lady Dorothy, during the quiet evening as they sat by the fire. Maud was reading a book and Lady Dorothy pretending to sew but really examining the new pet on her lap. "Well, we must get a special cup to-morrow, Maud, and by the way Stella must be thanked. I think I'll just go and write her a line. After all, it was so kindly meant though of course Stella knows quite well that nothing can really take the place of my poor darling."

Lady Dorothy felt that fidelity to the past required her to repeat this formula to other people.

"No other dog could replace Kiddie," said Maud enigmatically.

"What do you say?" asked her Aunt Dorothy a little sharply as she crossed the room.

"I said, Aunt Dorothy, that no other dog could replace Kiddie. You know what the poet says?

> "The earth is ample east and west,
> But two may not walk abreast."

"Oh, you and your poets!" grunted Lady Dorothy, and she walked off, but she had Pic-ca-noo-noo on her arm. The last post had just come in and there was no letter from

Fitzherbert. Maud went upstairs to her room. In a drawer lay a letter to Fitzherbert already written and stamped and addressed to him at his London address, but the envelope was not sealed. Maud pulled the paper out and read it:

"DEAR FATHER FITZHERBERT,

"I see in the papers that he is going to be removed to Orpenden. Your silence makes me afraid that this report is not correct, or that it does not mean a real recovery.

"Yours sincerely,

"MAUD MONCKTON."

There was nothing that she intended to add to this brief letter. It expressed all that she wanted to express. She put the paper back into its envelope and sealed it. Surely it would bring an answer. Then she went down to the drawing-room again and sat pretending to read, but really listening for Jackson's entrance. Fitzherbert would get the letter by the first post to-morrow, and a reply might come before the evening.

And so Maud waited with great patience till the following evening, but the post brought no answer. The next day passed slowly away and still no answer came, and the next after that! If only she had not "promised" to do nothing, she could have sent a formal request for news to the housekeeper at Orpenden.

It was on the third evening after she had sent her last letter that she began to be seriously alarmed at Fitzherbert's persistent silence.

CHAPTER XXIV

What has a dim religious light, the mysteries of Gothic arch and groined roof, the glimmer of lights, the ascending cloud of incense, the swift and subtle music, the subdued voices and the prostrate worshippers—what has all this to do with the problem of human life ?

In old days Maud would have answered this question without hesitation ; she would have answered that all this has very little to do with the problem of human life.

It certainly has very little significance to the harried speculator of the Stock Exchange, whose breathless scramble for " more money " is the chief contribution he offers to the solution of the human problem.

It is certainly of little significance to those " men and women of the world " who are occupied in swelling the number of their pleasures as their contribution to the human problem.

To all who feel confident that because there is neither hell nor heaven there is therefore no need for religion, it has as much and no more significance than has a season ticket to an exhibition that is now closed.

To Lady Dorothy it had a significance vaguely connected with safety in the next world, but this significance was only apparent on Sunday

mornings at eleven o'clock, an hour that lay conveniently between breakfast and lunch.

On other days and at other hours she was shrewdly suspicious of churches, of religious ceremonials, even of private meditation, because time that ought to be "employed" in the society of Noonoo and of afternoon callers ought not to be "wasted" on devotional exercises. In short, she was doubtful whether any ecclesiastical barrier ought to be raised between herself and the Eternal Source of Light except on Sunday at morning service (with the Litany) at a moderately Evangelical place of worship. Fortunately for Maud, Lady Dorothy was not one of those elderly ladies who are possessed by a sinister activity or by a passion for ceaseless desultory conversation. Unlike many of her sex, she allowed her companion to read, and she was at the present moment so much absorbed in her efforts to make Noonoo behave badly and thereby acquire a rich, free personality, that Maud found opportunities of slinking out of the house, full of a secret shame at doing something unaccustomed. There, in the dim aisle of a neighbouring church, she could be alone and give herself up to the task of searching within her own soul for that God for whom she longed, the God of Ursula and of Fitzherbert. And was the search hopeless? She hoped as a wrecked sailor hopes for a passing ship.

How immeasurably far from us are ultimate things! We creep forward slowly in our spiritual evolution as we do in every field of thought.

How many centuries did it take us to rise from the confident propitiation of strange stocks and stones to the height of that despairing cry of St. Augustine: that when man realises that he cannot apprehend God, then he apprehends Him best. Alas! we are at the mercy of our sensations, our perceptions, our ideas; they are the source of all our error and the only criterion we have of truth.

Meanwhile the days went by heavily for Maud, for no answer had as yet come from Fitzherbert. She was almost at the end of her patience when at last a letter arrived at lunch-time. She saw the handwriting at once and allowed the letter to remain unopened until Lady Dorothy went upstairs for her usual afternoon slumber. Then Maud went into the drawing-room, pulled a chair near to the fire and sat down deliberately to open her letter. She meant to read its contents, whatever they might be, with absolute calm. The letter consisted of a page of Fitzherbert's small, neat writing:—

"Dear Miss Monckton,

"There is no further need for you to be anxious about the health of Major Kames"—(here Maud drew a very long breath, a rather palpitating breath, notwithstanding her intention of being calm). "He has practically recovered from the injuries to his spine; they proved to be much slighter than was at first thought.

"He has also recovered from the shock, but I am sorry to say that the doctors have now

discovered, what had escaped their notice before, owing to the difficulty of examining him, some sort of injury to the right leg that cannot be remedied without incurring risks that they are not prepared to advise. Major Kames may always be a little lame: that is, it is probable that he may not be able to walk again without the aid of a stick. When he first recovered consciousness after his accident and was told that he might be disabled for some weeks, he sent a message to his Committee offering to resign his seat, but his resignation was refused. Meanwhile a pair has been found for him and the doctors hope that his lameness will be slight enough to allow of his taking up his Parliamentary duties shortly.

"Believe me, your sincere friend,

"JAMES FITZHERBERT."

Maud leant back in her chair, the letter lying on her knees. One sentence stood out clearly from the rest: "Major Kames may not be able to walk again without the aid of a stick."

Lionel Kames would never be able to hunt again. He would never be seen again striding loosely along the Parade at Brighton with his slight slouch; he would never be able to run easily up those half-dozen great shallow steps at Orpenden House.

Even if he were ever again to come to No. 2, Brown Street, he would have to mount these stairs to the drawing-room slowly, holding on to the balusters with his left hand and using his stick with his right.

Maud found herself picturing Kames walking to the foot of the stairs and beginning to mount them. In imagination she walked in front of him, looking back at his face as he came up one step at a time slowly. She could see his face, looking as it did that night after they had come back from the theatre; she could see his lips move and hear him say words that had since haunted her persistently:

"If we knew ourselves as we really are we should die of laughing—or go mad."

So much absorbed was she in her thoughts that she did not notice steps outside the drawing-room door, nor did she hear the door open. The sound of Jackson's voice broke in upon her harshly and unexpectedly.

"Mr. Broughton!"

Maud jumped up from her chair. Broughton was alone.

"You were asleep?" he questioned. "I am sorry I disturbed you."

"I wasn't asleep," said Maud, clasping her letter and trying to look unconcerned. "I was —only thinking."

"Thinking hard?" said her brother-in-law. Had she been thinking of Ursula?

Maud reseated herself and asked if Stella was well.

"Perfectly well," said Broughton, looking about the room as if to seek for a chair which he couldn't find. Then he suddenly left off looking and took a chair quite near to Maud and sat down on it.

"You and Stella are coming in to dinner to-morrow as usual of course," said Maud, now becoming conscious that her brother-in-law was not in his usual spirits. She guessed that his visit was purposely early and that he had come to speak about something—something troublesome—to judge by the look in his eyes as he turned them towards her.

Was it about domestic difficulties? Maud had never examined Stella's bills nor looked over her housekeeping accounts—such as they were—nor had she gone into the question of meals that would be suitable for an overworked husband. The prospect of having one hundred and fifty pounds a year in addition to their present income had banished from Stella's mind all misgivings as to the future.

She felt sure that she would now have plenty of money for everything—more than enough considering her really very economical management. There was therefore no need for Maud to interfere; in fact Stella had mentioned her doubts whether, after all, any one woman can realise the domestic problem of any other woman and that therefore the most sensible course for Maud to take was to take no course at all and to retire modestly from any attempt to muddle things.

Maud, thus admonished, had not mentioned the subject again.

Had George come to re-open the subject?

"You and Stella are not golfing this afternoon?" asked Maud. Somehow the word

"Stella" would come into every sentence she uttered. "Ought you to lose Saturday afternoon, George?"

"I can't always manage it," he replied. "I've promised to take Stella to see this new piece at the Court this evening and I can't manage that—and golf—and the train there and back—and my morning's work at the Laboratory."

Maud saw how tired he looked already with the work of the week behind him.

"Oh," she said, in a doubtful tone.

"And if we move, golf will be a little less accessible than it is now," and he laughed slightly.

So this was what he had come to speak about? Stella wanted to move? She wanted a larger flat in a more central position?

"Stella wants to move?" suggested Maud.

"She doesn't like Hampstead," said Broughton.

"But I thought you went there because of your health," said Maud.

"Yes," said Broughton. "But I am quite well."

Now that he was no longer flushed by his brisk walk in the cold air, the tired look under his eyes came out prominently and the leanness of his jaw was marked. He was still handsome and distinguished, but his youth had gone: what a contrast he and his wife were! She blooming like a rose, unaware of responsibility, undertaking nothing that required concentration

of mind or which entailed fatigue. He already beginning to be seared by the strain of work and anxious thoughts about the present and the future.

"Do *you* want to move?" asked Maud point-blank.

Broughton hesitated for a moment.

"I am not keen about it; it's different for me. I don't mind our sitting-room being small or the fact that we are not near anybody."

Maud's eyes dropped.

"The fact is, Maud," said Broughton, his voice a little askew, "I believe that Stella would be willing to stay where we are if she had more outlet for her energies." Here he gazed at Maud with wide-open eyes. "Our sitting-room is too small, Stella can't sing in it and there is no room for an audience. From her point of view the room is absurd."

Maud met his eyes as she sat thinking deeply.

"You see," continued Broughton, "it's rather hard on Stella. She has given up a career for my sake and I naturally want her to suffer as little as possible."

"Given up a career?" repeated Maud.

"A career of music," he said quietly. "A career in which she would have been able to distinguish herself, express her own genius and realise her true self. Now she is like a caged bird, unable to spread its wings and fly."

Stella's true self expressed in her own genius! Maud was filled with amazement! Possibly Stella might have got a post as chorus girl on

account of her great good looks, but that was more a matrimonial career than a career in art. George Broughton's generous sympathy and reverence for his wife was very beautiful, or, thought Maud, was he trying hard to keep up an illusion about her that had already begun to fade? Had he discovered that the enchanted palace with its distant glint of gold on nearer survey was only the glitter of sunrise upon the windows of a common house? Was he determined to be loyal to his romance in spite of this discovery?

"The difficulty of course is," continued Broughton, leaning back in his chair and crossing his knees with studied quiet, "that we simply can't afford a more expensive flat."

The "rights" of those who feel themselves born to delight humanity are now restricted by the severe conditions of the financial world, by the patience or lack of it in the public. But under a system of socialism in the future each individual will, no doubt, claim from the State an education suitable to his or her native talent. May there not be a heavy task, requiring a superhuman insight and a stern moral courage, awaiting those members of the bureaucracy whose duty it will be to judge, from an amazing crowd of aspirants, the few who are likely to acquire a mastery of the Arts?

Maud pondered for a moment over Broughton's words, then a bright idea came to her.

"Do you think," said Maud, "that if Aunt

Dorothy could be induced to give parties and let Stella sing at them, Stella would be contented to remain where she is ?"

Broughton uncrossed his legs and leaned forward rather eagerly.

"I think she would," he said, "I think it possible." In fact this was what he had already planned in his mind as a way out of the dilemma.

"Then I must try and persuade Aunt Dorothy," said Maud.

Broughton sat staring at Maud very much as a patient might at a trusted doctor who has just described a remedy.

"Do you think you could ?" he said. "You see, Maud, the fact is money difficulties are the very deuce !"

"I know they are," said Maud. "I've had some experience of them."

"I believe I could do really good work," said Broughton, "if I could only have my mind free from anxiety." He had not intended to say this ; the words had sprung to his lips almost automatically, moved by Maud's rapid response to his thoughts.

A slight colour came into his face. "Every man, when he marries," he went on, trying to cover his mistake rapidly, "has to face the fact that he is no longer his own master." He said "every man" with great emphasis. "It is just the same for women ; they have to give up much that is precious to them when they marry. They can't do just what they want to do."

Maud flushed a little. "Can't do just what

they want to ? " she said, and she began folding up the letter that was still clasped in her hands and put it away in its envelope. There was something a little fierce in her voice, which struck Broughton.

" We can always do just what we *really* can do," she added enigmatically. Then she noticed that Broughton's hand wandered to his chin and his eyes sought the ground rather gloomily, and she felt a pang of regret at her words. They had been uttered with a certain self-satisfaction and regardless of him. His burden would be less easy to bear if he came to believe that it was an unnecessary burden.

" I feel sure," she said hastily, " that something could be done for Stella. Now that Kiddie has gone and Aunt Dorothy is safely provided with a dog that doesn't bark—which was Stella's doing—I don't see why we shouldn't entertain a little more in a modest way. Can you keep Stella from taking any step for a fortnight or so ? That will give me time. I will find some good opportunity of discussing the subject with her."

Maud was keenly anxious to help him ; she showed it in her voice and manner and he was moved to speak his gratitude.

When he said " Good-bye," he stood holding her hand for a moment and looking as if he wanted to say something more. All this time, ever since he had first met her, Maud had never once mentioned Kames's name to him. He had caught a momentary glimpse of the little drama,

but it was at the period in his own life when he was absorbed by the romance and uniqueness of his own love affair. Since then he had had time to think of Maud, of Kames and of Kames's relations with Ursula; indeed, Stella had lately talked about them with a persistence that had been rather fatiguing. Was this sympathetic, sensible girl whose hand he was holding, the same girl who accepted and then jilted Kames in cold blood? As Broughton looked down at her, he decided in his own mind that, whatever had happened, it could not have been all her fault. Anyhow, there was nothing that he had a right to say even by way of sympathy. So he merely pressed her hand closely and went away.

It was a little irritating to him, on his return home, to hear from Stella that she had made up her mind to "find out" whether Lady Dorothy was still being "kept in the dark" about Major Kames.

"Don't interfere, Stella," he said, gently but firmly. "Let Maud manage her own affairs."

He could not have chosen words which would have aroused Stella's moral disapproval more keenly.

"It's not that I want to interfere, as you so politely put it," she said, "but I have what you haven't, my dear boy—some interest in other people's lives; and as to its being Maud's affair, it isn't her affair at all. Major Kames's accident is public property and it would be only just to him and to the memory of dear Ursula to let Aunt Dorothy know that Major

Kames was kind to her when she was dying. So I mean to tell Aunt Dorothy to-morrow."

Broughton looked at his wife. They were sitting in their tiny drawing-room. The piano was open and the music scattered about. Stella's feet were upon the fender; the large coffee stain on the carpet was conspicuous at her side. In view of their going to the theatre that evening George was to be treated at seven o'clock to what Stella called a "scramble meal," consisting of tea and indigestible compositions bought at a shop. She was full of contentment at the prospect. Her earrings were swinging and her eyes brilliant. She was not merely happy in the anticipation of an exciting evening, she was also glowing with a sense of importance, duty to be fulfilled on the following day (Sunday) when they went to dine as usual at No. 2, Brown Street.

"I shall tell Aunt Dorothy to-morrow, George," she said. "I really shall, dear," she said, laughing with renewed good temper.

CHAPTER XXV

Lady Dorothy had never in the past allowed Stella to smoke in her house: that is to say, Stella had smoked in her bedroom. Now that Stella crossed the old-fashioned threshold of No. 2, Brown Street as an independent married woman, she boldly marched into the library behind the dining-room to join her husband after dinner. There she smoked a cigarette hastily, and leaving her husband to follow her later on joined the gayer company of the two ladies in the drawing-room.

On this Sunday evening she came up even sooner than usual and by the most favourable chance she found Lady Dorothy alone, Maud having gone into the writing-room to search for a letter that her aunt had mislaid.

Stella went to the fire and seated herself on the fender stool. Then she plunged at once *in medias res*, prefacing her story about Major Kames with a brief "Of course, you know, Aunt Dorothy?"

Lady Dorothy didn't know; how could she know? She hadn't heard a word nor had she seen any notices in the paper, although she always read the paper through, excepting only the Parliamentary, the Foreign, the Learned, the Literary, the Legal and the Financial news.

Any emotion that she might have felt at having been kept in complete ignorance was swallowed up in the emotion she felt in the news itself. To hear anything of any kind about the long-lost Major Kames was exciting enough, and to hear that he had been injured and had recovered and was actually about to enter the world of public affairs was absorbingly entertaining and touching. But when Stella spoke of his visits to Ursula in her illness, that took Lady Dorothy's breath away.

What was it that had always attracted him to poor Ursula? Heaven only knew. It was a mystery, one of these mysteries that would always remain a mystery. Lady Dorothy had confident expectations that at the Day of Judgment what she called "practical mysteries" would be cleared up. She had a vague impression that the Recording Angel, sitting on nothing of course, because, in addition to the mental pictures suggested by her hymn-book, Lady Dorothy also held unconsciously a humble form of the "higher criticism"; the Recording Angel sitting (as already described), would turn over the pages of his book and read aloud to those disembodied spirits (in forms composed of some non-material material resembling chiffon) who were interested, the secrets of all the Ages. But the mysteries of the heart, such as why Major Kames admired Ursula, belonging as they did to a region outside of "actual facts," would never be disclosed.

"And to think," exclaimed Lady Dorothy,

"that that attractive man was within an inch of being killed!"

Major Kames lying between life and death! What if he had died? She could almost picture him "Beyond the Rubicon," singing (without a piano accompaniment). Fortunately that painful mental picture was unnecessary; he was alive and well.

Stella gazed up at her aunt's flushed face, at the eyes sparkling behind her eye-glasses. Stella was much flattered at the excitement her news had caused.

"I thought you ought to be told," she said, in a solemn voice.

"Of course," said Lady Dorothy, "of course. I wish I had known before. To think that he was lying so ill and no one from this house sent to inquire."

"I felt sure you ought to know," said Stella again very impressively.

"Of course I ought to have known," said the old lady. "I shall write to him immediately, before I go to bed."

"I couldn't be sure, of course," went on Stella, "that Maud hadn't told you, but I thought I ought to find out. George didn't want me to; he wanted me to leave it all to Maud and to say nothing; but it appears, as I rather suspected, that Maud said nothing to you about it."

"Fancy her not telling me!" cried Lady Dorothy. "It really was too silly; there are limits to that sort of propriety. I suppose it was a case of *amour-propre*."

"I am glad I was right in telling you," said Stella, as she stroked Noonoo's placid head. "I am glad I was right—very glad!"

"Quite right!" said Lady Dorothy. "He's been in a serious accident and must be sympathised with and he must also be thanked for having looked after Ursula. I can't ask him to come and see us, of course. Dear me! What a pity the whole thing is! If Maud remains an old maid, which 'pon my word seems likely, she'll only have herself to blame."

Stella was going to say once more, "I am glad I was right!" for she felt that her devotion to the cause of duty had not been sufficiently acknowledged, when there came a sound of some one at the door and she said instead very hastily, "Don't say anything just now to Maud, please, Aunt Dorothy; it would be so awkward for me. Maud wouldn't understand." But the lady addressed had already turned herself in her chair at the sound of Maud's entrance and she called to her niece in a voice that prophesied an approaching storm.

Maud came in and walked up to her aunt's chair. There she stood looking down at her aunt's animated face. She guessed what was coming.

"My dear child," said Lady Dorothy, "you have left me to find out by accident that Major Kames showed extraordinary kindness to poor Ursula at the last, when we couldn't be with her—in fact, when we didn't know she was ill. Also that he has himself been nearly at death's

door. Now I call that heartless of you, or else," she added, relenting at Maud's white face, "or else very silly, too silly for a woman of your age who ought to know something about social obligations by this time. We ought, of course, to have thanked Major Kames. Thanked him," she repeated, nodding her head emphatically.

Maud stood silent. Stella, very much embarrassed, stroked Noonoo so roughly that the little animal rose up from her lap and tried to dodge away from under the imprisoning hands.

Lady Dorothy's vexation was already rapidly fading away before Maud's humility.

"We have always avoided talking about Major Kames on your account, but it is going too far, my dear, to suppose that a man's name must never be mentioned even if he is dying simply because you don't want to marry him. That's turning sense into nonsense."

To make the situation more trying for Maud, the door opened and Broughton came in. He perceived instantly that he was involved in a domestic scene and stood for a second thinking whether he could, without blame, go back to the library and smoke another pipe. But it was too late.

"George!" called out Lady Dorothy. "All this time I have never known that Major Kames looked after poor Ursula, when we didn't know, you know, how ill she was. Just think, he has never been thanked! It is more than annoying, it is scandalous!"

"Yes, indeed," said Broughton in a con-

ciliatory voice, "of course he ought to be thanked. You ought to write and thank him, Aunt Dorothy." And he moved away towards the piano and began looking over some old music that belonged to nobody in particular, pieces that had been left behind by their owners for many, many years and conscientiously collected together into a dismal heap by Jackson.

At last Maud's lips moved.

"I am sorry, Aunt Dorothy. I didn't realise the whole situation," she said.

"I should think you didn't," said Lady Dorothy. "Fortunately he is quite well again. He might have died. Fortunately he is quite well again."

"Major Kames is not quite well again," Maud spoke slowly and stiffly; "his right leg was injured and it is feared that he may always have to walk with the aid of a stick."

"How do you know that, my dear?" demanded Lady Dorothy. "Stella, you never mentioned that!"

"A mutual friend, Father Fitzherbert, wrote yesterday, telling me," said Maud.

Lady Dorothy stared at her niece, and then exclaimed, "Dear me!" Then she sank back in her chair, and Noonoo, who had succeeded in releasing himself from Stella, came round to his mistress's chair and jumped upon her lap.

"My poor pet!" murmured Lady Dorothy, her thoughts still in a whirl of excitement at the news about Major Kames.

"Walk with a stick—how sad!" she said

remorsefully. "A man of that build, already inclined to err on the stout side, is bound to grow very stout if he can't take a great deal of exercise; and there's one thing a man ought never to get, nor a woman either, and that is stout!"

The pallor of Maud's face was suffused now by a warm tint which spread even to the roots of her hair.

"Surely Major Kames can get as stout as he likes, Aunt Dorothy," she said. "You talk of him as if he were not a human being! I don't understand your callousness. It wouldn't make the slightest difference to me if he became very stout."

Having said these words, Maud glanced round the room with startled eyes, as if she had heard them pronounced by some one who had just come in.

"My dear Maud!" exclaimed Lady Dorothy. Fancy Maud talking about other people being callous!

Stella stared up from the floor with open astonishment at her sister. Broughton coughed over the music.

"I don't suppose he cares now whether it would make a difference. I didn't mean that," said Maud, and she moved towards the door.

There was a brief, strained silence in the room. Then Broughton threw down the sheets of music which he was pretending to read upon the piano and strode towards the door too.

"Excuse me, Aunt Dorothy," said Maud,

rather faintly. "I hope I haven't been rude, but I am not feeling very well and I'm frightfully stupid. Good night!"

She passed Broughton with a pitiful attempt to smile, and then with bowed head and drooping shoulders she sped upstairs.

A year and a half ago she had hurried up those same stairs her heart and brain throbbing, but how different were the circumstances now! Indeed, she seemed to herself a different person.

When he had closed the door behind her, Broughton went up to the two women and stood looking down on Lady Dorothy.

"Gracious goodness!" she exclaimed. "How extraordinary Maud is!"

"I can't congratulate you, dear Aunt Dorothy, on your choice of a subject for after-dinner speaking," he said in the same tone in which he had always expostulated with her about Kiddie. Lady Dorothy would not have endured that tone from anybody but her nephew.

"Maud has gone too far with this nonsense about never mentioning Major Kames's name again. Anybody would think he was dead and buried," she said with some flash of returning indignation.

"I thought I ought to tell you, Aunt Dorothy," began Stella again. "I was sure it was the right thing to do." She nodded her head two or three times at the space between herself and Lady Dorothy; the nods were meant for her husband. She felt that she had spoken when the time was ripe, perhaps,

overripe. As to George, he showed a curious obstinacy at times, and was capable of being really unreasonable.

During the rest of that evening Lady Dorothy could speak of nothing else but Major Kames and Ursula, of Major Kames's accident and of Major Kames's injured leg and particularly of the cruel loss of distinction that Major Kames's figure would probably suffer through lack of sufficient exercise. She refrained, however, from referring again directly to Maud; she was a little afraid of her nephew's reproof; but her thoughts kept on flitting back and back again to Maud's astonishing announcement that it would make no difference to her if Major Kames became very stout.

No woman in her senses could go on admiring a man as much if he were getting very stout; it wasn't in human nature to do so; and Maud had not admired him when he was, comparatively speaking, thin.

Had she, when it was too late, when only memories of him were left to her, fallen in love with Major Kames?

The old lady longed to find out what Maud really meant, if, indeed, Maud knew what she meant herself.

"I had hoped that Maud would come down again," she said as she rose with obvious alacrity at Stella's first movement to say good-bye.

"I expect she's gone to bed," said Stella; "she said she wasn't feeling well."

"Yes, to be sure, she said she was not well," said Lady Dorothy, and she tried to look

unconscious of her nephew's glance. Was Maud really in love with Major Kames? Or was she, perhaps, merely a little sorry for him now he was hurt?

"I must take up some phenacetin to her," she said decidedly. "Well, then, Stella, I shall write to Major Kames at once and say how grateful we all are for his past kindness to poor Ursula when Maud and I were away trying to recruit."

Lady Dorothy uttered the last words with a touch of pathos, suddenly remembering all the sad, sad tragedy of Kiddie, and how Piccanoonoo (whom she held in her arms at that moment) could never, never take his place; though it was indeed through no fault of his own, poor mite; he could not help being born contented and gentle, it was not his little fault.

"Yes, please, say all that is proper in the nicest words," said Stella.

"Of course I can't ask him to the house," said Lady Dorothy; "that would be quite impossible and I suppose he will often be in town now when Parliament is sitting," and she sighed deeply.

"You can't ask him, of course, unless——" and here Stella's blue eyes shone like two polished turquoises and her dimples seemed actually to twinkle in her cheeks.

"Unless what?" demanded her aunt eagerly.

"Oh, I don't know," said Stella, going to the door; "George will be cross if I say anything about it. But at least, Aunt Dorothy," she

added, turning round at the door and waving her good-bye, "I am glad I spoke; I thought it my duty to tell you. I am so glad I was right."

As soon as Lady Dorothy had heard the front door close, she put Noonoo into his basket at the side of the fire and besought him to remain there patiently for a few minutes while she went up to see "poor Auntie Maudie."

Then the old lady went upstairs with great dignity, making little coughs as she ascended. She went into her own bedroom for a moment and looked for her bottle of phenacetin. Having found it, she went up another flight to Maud's room. What a climb it was! She waited to get her breath back; then she knocked gently at her niece's door.

At first there came no reply, but in answer to a second knock Maud's voice demanded: "Who is it?"

"Aunt Dorothy," said the old lady rather meekly. One of the most embarrassing things in the world is to answer quite simply the question: "Who are you?"

Maud's voice answered, "Come in!"

Lady Dorothy opened the door and went in. Maud was lying in bed propped up by pillows, reading by the light at the head of her bed.

"How is the headache?" asked her aunt, with an attempt at cheerfulness.

Maud's pale brown hair falling about her shoulders in two long massive plaits gave her almost the air of a sad, naughty child. Her

brown eyes looked heavy; her lips were a trifle swollen.

"I have no headache, Aunt Dorothy," she said.

"Oh!" said Lady Dorothy, "then you don't want any of my phenacetin?"

"No, thanks," said Maud; "I don't need any."

"You mustn't mind your old aunt scolding you," said Lady Dorothy blandly. "You must remember, Maud, that it was a great shock to me to find that everybody knew all about Major Kames but myself."

"I am so sorry you were vexed," said Maud.

Lady Dorothy moved to Maud's easy-chair and sat down. "I was very cross, my dear," she said briefly. Then she turned her face to the bed and blinked hard at Maud. The question that had been tormenting her all the evening was on her lips; she could keep it back no longer.

"Are you in earnest, Maud? I mean about Major Kames." It seemed somehow like aiming a pistol shot at Maud. Would Maud fall down on her pillow and collapse?

"Yes," said Maud quietly, and she did not collapse.

"You really are?" exclaimed Lady Dorothy. "I mean, do you actually want him to—well, to speak plainly—to propose again? That's what I mean."

"I understand," said Maud as quietly as before.

"And you don't think that if you saw him leaning on a stick, you know—and—getting stout—you would run away as you did before when he had a really good figure?"

Maud coloured and shook her head.

"Well!" exclaimed Lady Dorothy, "I am amazed! But what's to be done I'm sure I don't know." And she waited for further enlightenment.

"Nothing can be done!" replied Maud simply.

"Nothing! Why not?" exclaimed her aunt, who had expected to hear Maud suggest some plan that she would consider unsuitable. But Maud seemed to have no plan and the old lady looked disappointed.

"I don't deserve to have him now," said Maud.

"Deserve, child! What has that got to do with it?" exclaimed her aunt. How extraordinarily unpractical it was of Maud to talk like this.

"I don't suppose he would trust me again," said Maud, closing the book that she had till now kept open with one finger.

"Fiddlesticks about trust!" said Lady Dorothy. "The only question is whether he is still in love with you. If he isn't, it's off; if he is, it's on again."

Maud winced at this way of putting it; it was put as if neither she nor Major Kames were moral beings.

"I have given my promise, Aunt Dorothy,

to be guided in the matter by Father Fitzherbert," said Maud, bracing herself up for the coming storm.

"And who, in the name of wonder, is Father Fitzherbert?" demanded the old lady. The title "Father" had escaped her notice before, but now that she was calmer she noticed it and it offended her Protestant ears; also this avowal of Maud's roused her suddenly to jealousy. What right had any Fitzherberts to usurp her position as patroness of Maud and Maud's affairs?

"Father Fitzherbert knew Ursula," explained Maud, "and he knows Lionel and—me."

"One of the men Ursula used to confess to!" said Lady Dorothy. "And so Major Kames confesses! Well, I should have thought he was too sensible a man to do anything so weak-minded."

Maud did not reply; indeed, Lady Dorothy did not expect a reply. She was accustomed to make statements of a contentious kind when she was annoyed, statements that she suspected were not necessarily true, which were even probably false but which relieved the tension of her nerves.

"I have just written to Father Fitzherbert," said Maud, in a low voice, as if it cost her a good deal to speak, "to tell him what I feel about —Lionel."

"You have?" burst out Lady Dorothy. "To this Fitzherbert?"

"I want him to know," said Maud slowly; "but nothing will come of it, Aunt Dorothy."

"I should think nothing would come of it," exclaimed the old lady, "if you put it into the hands of a priest! Their one idea is to prevent marriage. If they had their own way no one would bring children into the world but the riffraff at the very bottom, and a fine state of things that would bring about! I have no patience with them! Is the letter posted?"

"Yes," said Maud.

Lady Dorothy turned and looked into the fire.

"And what do you think he is going to do now that he knows that you want to marry Major Kames?"

She spoke with obvious jealousy.

"I don't know," said Maud.

"And don't care!" said Lady Dorothy, full of vexation. "Maud, you're the most sensible woman in the world except where your own happiness is concerned."

"Father Fitzherbert will do whatever is best for Lionel—and me," said Maud. "Dear Aunt Dorothy, I have reason to trust him."

"Oh, you think so!" said her aunt. "Well, I should doubt that. You must remember that it is a year and a half since you broke off the engagement. You don't know what has happened since, especially if he has been ill. Why, at this moment some little calculating nurse may have been making him promise to marry her. Would you like that to happen?"

Maud did not answer.

Lady Dorothy got up from her chair, "My

dear, I quite forgot that I promised Noonoo faithfully that I would come back to him in a few minutes, and as you know, promises made to a dumb animal are like debts of honour. I really must go."

Lady Dorothy had also obtained the information she had desired. It was information of a most upsetting kind that touched the affairs of No. 2, Brown Street. It needed much thought. She came near to the bed, bent over to kiss her niece, and then looked at her narrowly as if she was a new acquaintance.

"I am going to write to Major Kames at once," she said quietly, "and I shall ask him to let me know how he is. I shall do that much."

Maud put her arms round her aunt's neck, but she made no remark.

"Is this Fitzherbert," asked Lady Dorothy, "one of the Fitzherberts of Adingley?"

"I think so," said Maud, but she spoke as if she scarcely heard.

Lady Dorothy walked to the door with a slight sniff of satisfaction. "They're all a little mad," she said. It was certainly a positive proof of madness in any individual that he should at this time of day dress himself in a cloak and go about calling himself "Father."

Lady Dorothy went downstairs into the drawing-room slowly and thoughtfully. Suppose, after all, Maud was to marry Major Kames and go away and live at Orpenden? Would this empty drawing-room be so very desolate?

A year ago Lady Dorothy would have thought so, but into her life had crept once more a congenial companionship; she was not alone. Piccanoonoo was waiting for her in his basket. Not, it is true, with those piercing shrieks of impatience that she had loved so dearly and which were silenced for ever, but a little rogue lay there banging his tail on the side of the basket and staring at her with his large goggle eyes, full of satisfaction at her return. No, the drawing-room was not lonely after all, and then there would come frequent invitations to Orpenden; there would be delightful short visits to break the monotony of winter and spring. People had never been eager to have darling Kiddie as their guest; they did not understand his nature; he was what is called "vital." Lady Dorothy loved him for being "vital." It was Ursula's lack of being "vital" as well as her lack of youth and beauty that had made Lady Dorothy indifferent to her.

Lady Dorothy loved—so she thought—the agitating and alluring qualities of a rich, heady personality. She was attracted—so she thought—by dear, warm, natural human nature with its lovable spice of wickedness. She would not, of course, have put up with any rich headiness in her butler or her housemaid or in any person whom she employed. Any such wealth in Mrs. Jackson's personality would have been inconvenient and if she had reason to suppose that her family solicitors had any lovable spice of wickedness in their nature she would have

removed her affairs to the care of another firm; but that—as people say—is different.

Now Kiddie's successor was not "vital," and yet he was already popular. Lady Dorothy could fancy herself writing off notes to Maud at Orpenden, saying this sort of thing:

"So many thanks—yes, of course—then please expect *us* to-morrow about four o'clock."

However agreeable these anticipations were, the immediate question was, would anything at all come of Maud's change of mind?

Lady Dorothy went into the writing-room and sat down at her table. She began writing, and had any one been in the room they would have seen her lips gradually shape themselves into an affable smile. She was smiling as if she was actually addressing her correspondent in the flesh; she found it easy to write, the words flowed from her pen without conscious effort. If only—if only she could ask him to come and see her as soon as he was well enough, or if only she could propose to go and call on him at Orpenden! She felt a strong conviction that if she could actually see him she could bring about "a happy conclusion." And how much she would enjoy seeing him again! Now, if *she* had been a girl engaged to a charming man like Major Kames, nothing in the wide world would have made her break the engagement off and risk losing him for ever!

CHAPTER XXVI

MEANWHILE, upstairs, Maud lay back on her pillows. A book that she had been holding in her hand had fallen upon the floor; the lights were still burning. She had forgotten everything but that sinister remark of Lady Dorothy's that some other woman might at this moment be standing between herself and the man she had at last learned to love. Time was passing quickly; who knew what might not have happened to Lionel Kames—what was actually happening? A sick man is so much at the mercy of his surroundings!

"Nothing would come of it," she had said to Lady Dorothy, nothing would come of her confession to Father Fitzherbert that she had learned to love Lionel Kames; and yet as she lay there motionless, her eyes fixed mechanically before her, Maud knew that she had said those words only in self-defence in order to force herself to face a future that she dreaded. Deep down in her mind she hoped with a desperate energy that her words would prove false and that something would come of it!

That February afternoon, a year and a half ago, when she came by such a strange chance upon Fitzherbert and he asked her if she was strong enough and tender enough to "pretend"

to love the man she was engaged to marry—that afternoon seemed to her now to be a strange, unaccountable dream. On that night when the last sad intimate writing of Ursula's had stirred in Maud's heart such passionate emotion that the raging of the storm outside was unheard and forgotten, on that night a dormant element in Maud's nature had come to life: the power of pity, and with it new thoughts about the man she had rejected and a new conception of the relations of human beings to one another, a new standard of duty and of mutual forbearance. As the days accumulated this conception had grown in strength, Ursula's trust in Lionel became her own, Ursula's sympathy for him became hers; she lived over and over again their relationship with each other until she was seized with a desperate hunger for something more than the creation of her own mind, a synthesis of memories; she was seized with a desperate hunger for his actual presence.

Her letter to Fitzherbert had gone that night and he would get it in the morning if he were in town. She would try to wait till Tuesday morning, and if no letter came then she would wire and implore him for an answer. She looked at her watch; it was eleven o'clock. It would be just possible for her to hear by lunch-time to-morrow—fifteen hours! Or she might hear after dinner at nine o'clock—twenty-two hours! If she did not hear before the first post on Tuesday she would have to wait thirty-three hours! That would be the limit of her

endurance. She had waited for many days patiently, and now even hours had become intolerable.

Even suppose that Fitzherbert answered her letter promptly, he might not propose to help her in any way. Although she deserved no help she was certain that he would help her. She had no fear of it; her fear was that he might be away on some fresh mission and that the letter would not reach him immediately, or when it did reach him it might arrive at a moment when he was busy. Above all, what she chiefly feared was that the whole matter might have been taken out of Fitzherbert's hands by Lionel himself and that Lionel at that very moment, believing her to have forgotten him, might be pledging his future to another woman. That thought made Maud sick at heart.

Should she wire to Lionel to-morrow morning? Wire what? Wire that she had made him wait for nearly two years, but that she could not wait for thirty-three hours!

Apart from her promise to Fitzherbert, which must be kept, the idea of thrusting herself upon Lionel before she had some proof that he would remember her was repulsive. Fitzherbert was right in telling her to put the matter into his hands—if only the hours would pass!

She must try to sleep, because every hour that she lay awake only prolonged her misery. She put out the light and lay down.

Maud lay with eyes fast shut and a prayer upon her lips, shutting the portals of her spirit

against the ominous Powers of the Night, and soon after the great bell that watches over the sleeping city had struck one, she fell into a sleep without dreams.

The next morning she awoke with the consciousness that at least one night had been put behind her. She ought to be thankful for that. A letter might come before nightfall. It is easier to be patient in broad daylight; so much may happen while the sun travels slowly westward.

Lady Dorothy scanned her face narrowly when she came downstairs to breakfast.

"No letter from Mr. Fitzherbert?" she said.

The remark was so preposterous that Maud, depressed as she was, laughed aloud.

"He will have only just got my letter, Aunt Dorothy," she said.

"Humph!" said the elder lady, as if, nevertheless, he would and could have received the letter and replied simultaneously had he not been going about dressed in a cloak and calling himself "Father."

All that day neither of the two women thought of anything else but the letter—that did not come.

Yesterday Maud would have shrunk painfully from hearing the name of Lionel Kames pronounced aloud by any one; but now it was a relief to her to know that Lady Dorothy shared her secret and was waiting, too, to know what the future would bring.

When letters were brought in at lunch there was no letter addressed in Fitzherbert's hand.

"Humph!" said Lady Dorothy again.

Maud smiled a little. "I must wait," she said, and sighed.

After dinner the same thing happened—no letter!

How slowly the hours crept along! They were at the threshold of another night. This would be the last night. Maud went upstairs to her room with a fixed determination to wait no longer than the morning. If no letter came then, she would wire to Fitzherbert for instructions. Could it be possible that he was still distrustful of her, was afraid that what she loved was an idealised portrait, painted by the glamour of her own fancy, and that when brought face to face with the real Lionel Kames she would shrink from the actual personality of the living man, a man seamed with the experience of half a lifetime trying to retrieve wasted time; generous, but faulty?

Were these Fitzherbert's thoughts about her or had he guessed the change that had taken place in her? In the old days she could admire or despise passionately; pity she did not feel. She felt it now—pity that is born of the consciousness of the tragedy of all human life, of the community of grief.

It was this pity that had engendered love, and it had grown little by little until it had gathered to a torrent—late in the girl's life—just as her youth was passing. Was it too late?

The second night passed away—and the morning came. The maid brought letters to Maud's bedside, but among them was still no letter from Fitzherbert. Maud took paper and pencil, and sitting up in her bed she began to compose a message. While she was writing a knock came at her bedroom door; it opened and her Aunt Dorothy came in. The cord of the old lady's eye-glasses was hanging loose, and her dressing-gown had been thrown hastily over her. She had a letter in her hand. Maud could tell by her face that Lionel had written it.

"A letter from Lionel!" she exclaimed, and Lady Dorothy came straight to Maud's bed. Maud could see the large handwriting which she had in old days despised because it did not look scholarly. Her hand shook as she took the letter; it was like a letter from some dear one whom she had thought dead. She opened it and tried to read it. Tears ran down her cheeks, blotting out the words and making them unreadable.

"I am afraid I can't read it," she said; "not just now!"

Lady Dorothy was much surprised and disconcerted.

"Why, my dear, you are upset," she said. "Well, it's a charming letter, full of tender remembrance of Ursula and gratitude for our gratitude. Read it some other time. Keep it!"

The old lady nodded her head once or twice patronisingly, and then she turned away and went to the door, refraining from the remark,

"No letter from Mr. Fitzherbert," which she had intended to make, in order to drive home the truth of that clerical person's incompetence in affairs of the heart. For a long time Maud found herself unable to think connectedly. When she could think she sat up and looked at the telegram form on which she had begun to write. It was on the table by her bed. Only her name was needed to complete it. She wrote her name, and then a sudden and unaccountable impulse took strong possession of her and she took up the paper and tore it into small pieces. Then she read that letter—once, twice, many times.

All that morning she felt as if she was living in a dream. She went out into the morning air, walking along by her aunt's side, quiescent and almost without thoughts like one hypnotised, and she was strangely calm in her mind; her anxiety seemed suddenly to have left her. She was waiting without impatience and without fear.

Lady Dorothy was surprisingly sympathetic and asked her no questions. When at lunch-time no letters at all were brought in, she said nothing; she did not even mention Fitzherbert's name.

After lunch, Maud went for a drive, taking Noonoo with her. Kames's letter was tucked into her dress. The day was slipping away and yet Maud was doing nothing. She was possessed with this strong impression—that the future had shaped itself independently of her thoughts

and that she need do nothing; in fact, that there was nothing for her to do. So calm and resigned was she that when she returned to the house she even noted the presence of a cat seated on the stucco pillar of the gate. At the sight of Noonoo it turned and twisted away among the palings. Maud called to it with all the persuasiveness she knew, and finally it relaxed so far as to consent to return, Noonoo being obviously harmless. It again seated itself upon the pillar, and there it sat pretending to have lost all consciousness of her presence. When she called to it, it merely stretched its chin high in the air and looked keenly across the street pretending to see something of importance, affecting the air of a person who wishes to remain exclusive without being actually rude.

Maud went up the steps and let herself into the house with her latchkey. She found Jackson in the hall carrying the tray up for tea earlier than usual.

He turned round and spoke to her.

"Her ladyship told me to tell you, Miss," he said, "that she is in the writing-room with Mr. Fitzherbert."

"With whom?" she asked.

"With Mr. Fitzherbert."

This, then, was the end. This was what she had been waiting for.

Maud went upstairs and walked into the drawing-room. It was empty. She could hear her aunt's voice in the next room. She must have heard her come, for the door opened between

the rooms and Lady Dorothy came out, her cheeks rather flushed, and behind her came a tall figure which Maud had learned to associate with what was most important in her life. He smiled when their eyes met. All was well. Maud felt sure of it; the certainty of it suffused her whole frame with warmth.

"Father Fitzherbert and I have arranged it," said Lady Dorothy, speaking his name as if he had long been her most intimate friend. "He is going to take us over to-morrow to Orpenden to see our dear invalid, Major Kames. Well, Maud, what do you say?"

Maud said nothing but an almost whispered "Thanks." She took Fitzherbert's hand and leaned upon it for a moment, her eyes downcast and a slight tremble on her lips that he alone noticed. In another moment Maud had recovered her composure.

"I am so glad," she said, "I am so glad, Aunt Dorothy!"

"I should think so," said that lady. "I can't imagine anybody not being glad at the prospect of seeing Major Kames, such a charming man!"

To her excited imagination it seemed as if there could be no further obstacle to Maud's marriage with Major Kames. In fact, it seemed as if the whole dismal episode of Major Kames's disappearance had never been and they had slipped back to eighteen months ago, except for the sad fact that Major Kames was a little lame and therefore threatened with stoutness.

CHAPTER XXVII

A SLIGHT shower of snow had fallen during the night, the first snow of the coming winter, snow that lay thin and loose and white and sparkling upon the road and footways and was melted and sucked into the glistening soil before noon. The air was clear, still and sharp. Above the roofs of the houses and the London streets thin fleecy clouds could be seen passing hurriedly to the north-west, as if flying before the fiery strides of the sun as he climbed up his slanting pathway across the December sky.

A landaulette had started from No. 2, Brown Street, and was speeding through the dreary monotony of the southern London suburbs out on to a high road in Surrey towards Orpenden. It was so fine that even Lady Dorothy did not oppose Maud's suggestion that the carriage should be opened. Fitzherbert was strongly of opinion too that it ought to be open, and he seated himself opposite the two ladies, with the sunshine broadly exposing the shabbiness of his black brimmed hat and the traces of age and hard wear that were visible down the front of his black cloak. Maud longed to tidy those buttons that seemed on the point of "giving up" from lack of physical strength with which

to stand the strain of a religious life ; one button actually dangled from the frayed skeleton of what had once been a stout and useful neck.

Maud wanted to put out her hand and twist off that button and put it into her muff for future restoration to its proper place. But instead of this active ministration she was compelled to sit back in her seat and do nothing but listen idly to the talk that went on between her Aunt Dorothy and Fitzherbert about persons with whom they were mutually acquainted. Strangely enough, Maud felt that of her two companions not Lady Dorothy, who presumably had "loved and lost" (once at least), but Fitzherbert, who had possibly never loved at all, understood her silence and her preoccupation. Had he never loved at all ?

She glanced across at him wonderingly and met his eyes looking at her with that mixture of humour and intensity of purpose that was the dominant feature of a very striking personality. She felt herself reddening a little under his gaze and she turned away and looked at the houses which they were swiftly passing. The traffic was gradually being left behind ; the roads were becoming more suburban. Presently they were among villas and gardens with leafless trees and the dingy hedges of the populous part of Surrey.

They turned into what looked like a main road and came out on to a battered common tarnished with its proximity to London. They passed it and were among villas again. At

last they were in the actual country. Here was a thatched cottage and here unspoiled meadows in which cattle were eating some scattered roots. The air was purer and lighter.

She found herself glancing from side to side keenly and leaning forward as she did so. Then, conscious that her movements betrayed excitement, she sank back again into her corner. On they went!

The brown hedges were speckled over with a myriad prismatic drops of water; the ground under their wheels was light and moist. There was a smell of wild herbs that had ripened and were dissolving into their elements again through the agency of night frosts, of damp, and of winter sunshine. In a short time they would be at Orpenden. Maud felt a great stirring at her heart and her pulses beat rapidly. On they went! How would she bear it when they actually came to the gates of Orpenden? They sped on for a mile or so and then took a turn westwards. Was this the road, or this? No, not this gate; there was no archway over it! Still they went on, but southwards now with the noonday sun straight in their eyes. Now, this was the road! It looked like it! The car began to slacken its pace and then it blew its warning, rounded suddenly and went under a grey archway on each side of which was a stone ball, grey with the weather. Here was the long chestnut avenue! The trees had lost their golden harvest, but they stood there warm and brown, trusty guardians of the memory of

summer. Some rooks cawed overhead. Maud felt her face stinging and her hands cold. Lady Dorothy was stretching her neck to see the house. There it was with its mullioned windows and grey chimney-stacks, from which thin blue smoke went up into the cloudless sky.

The car drew up before the great shallow sweep of steps. The front doors stood wide open, just as they had stood open eighteen months ago, only then Ursula was here and she passed through them first. Oh that she were here now!

Fitzherbert got out. Lady Dorothy made no sign of moving. Maud glanced from one to the other nervously.

"Lady Dorothy is going on with me to see the church," he said; "we shall be back by lunch," and he held out his hand to Maud. That hand held to her gave her a sudden confidence. She stepped out silently and then stood looking back at her aunt. She understood that this was a concerted plan. She was to go in alone!

"*Au revoir!*" called out Lady Dorothy in a dismissive voice, while she pretended to be much occupied in rearranging the rugs. "*Au revoir*, my dear!"

Fitzherbert had dropped Maud's hand. She was alone, walking up the steps, he following. All her fears returned upon her. How could she enter those doors alone?

"What are you afraid of?" he questioned, at her side now, and touching the bell.

"I am afraid of everything," she said, "because I care too much—I suppose."

"You can't care too much—in the right way," he replied.

A man opened the inner doors, and Fitzherbert led her into the great panelled hall. There were the stained windows lit up by the sun and throwing fine fans of colour across the staircase; there were the portraits looking out silently. A great fire burned on the hearth. Maud scarcely knew what she did. She felt herself being helped off with her thick coat. What was to come next? She waited for Fitzherbert's voice, her will simply following his.

"Take off your veil and gloves," he said. She glanced up at him and obeyed. She heard him dismissing the servant, telling the man that he would take Miss Monckton to the library himself. Perhaps it was the white look in her face, as she stood waiting for a sign from him, that made him lay his hand on her arm as he guided her towards the library door. Was Lionel in there? If her heart went on beating like this, she would not be able to speak to him; her voice would be gone.

"He is downstairs now, but still on a couch," Fitzherbert said in a low voice. "Don't be frightened, child!"

Maud bent her head and made no answer.

He led her across the floor.

"Leave no room in your heart for fear or for self-pity," he said, still in a low voice. "The

modern world is so tender-hearted of itself that it would re-write the parable of the ten talents and make it end differently."

She looked up into the face that was bent towards her.

He went on speaking. "The modern world would insist that the man who refused to work and hid his talent should not be punished but should be forgiven and pitied. But that is not the way to view life if you want to 'know what is true and make what is beautiful.' The Master of the World *does* demand a harvest which we have ourselves to sow and reap in the sweat of our labour, so be strong, be strong!"

The library door was already open and before Maud knew what was happening Fitzherbert had left her side and was gone.

There was sunshine too in the windows of the library chequered by the shadows of the mullions. Across a great space over which she had to tread was a couch on which half lay, half sat, Major Kames. Around him were scattered books and papers.

His face had paled somewhat from its usual healthy tan and it was turned towards her. He was the same man and yet not the same; the face of this man she loved.

The door was closed behind her and they were alone.

She moved towards the couch. "I have come to thank you," she said in a trembling voice, her eyes lowered as she walked. "Don't try to move!"

He sat silent, leaning forward towards her, his hands grasping the rug that lay across his knees. She came up to him, feeling more than seeing that his features were set and that the pulses in his temples throbbed. She knelt down by the couch and took the hand that lay on the rug nearest to her. She put it against her cheek. Then she pulled it gently down till it rested over her heart, and there she held it with both her hands pressed over it as if she were a mother clasping some babe long lost and restored at last.

Moments slipped by—the most precious, perhaps, in their lives—moments of profound peace and silence.

"Maud," he said at last, trying to speak calmly, "don't pity me too much! I don't deserve it. I have lived for forty years and have nothing to show for it but one or two grey hairs, and now I am lame!"

Not a word of reproach, of distrust; no demand for himself, not even a word of forgiveness which might have implied that there was something to be forgiven; only an apology, self-accusation and humility.

She made no answer, but she slid one of her arms over him and laid her face against him, weeping very softly from pure joy.

It was a long time before they could articulate any words, except each other's names, uttered over and over again.

When Maud could speak coherently she whispered: "Try not to mind being lame!"

and then she raised herself and sitting on the edge of his couch, she held both his hands.

"I mind for your sake," said Kames. "I'm ashamed of your having a lame brute of a husband!"

"I don't mind it," urged Maud. "In fact, dear, I prefer it."

"Prefer it!" exclaimed Kames, half laughing, but with a moisture in his eyes that he could not hide.

"I prefer it," said Maud, "because—because you can't run away from me."

"A man could be faithful to you, my dear," he said pressing both her hands, "without needing to bash his leg to help him."

"Well, but," said Maud, "now that you've done it, it may be useful," and her lips and eyes broke away from tears to the subdued laughter of great happiness. Then she suddenly became silent. His happiness was so new, it was so rare and strange to have her love, that it seemed to him as if it might slip away and leave him as suddenly as it came.

"What is it?" he asked. "What is it, Maud?"

The anxiety in his face pained her.

"You were injured in going to see Ursula," she said. "You were doing what I ought to have been doing. I have always been selfish, even towards Ursula; how can you trust me, dear, how can you?"

He was going to protest, but she would not let him speak. "I only come to you, now, Lionel, because I want to."

He pulled her nearer to him.

"Yes, but," she said, resisting, "it would be more unselfish if I came to you not because I loved you but because I was strong enough and tender enough to pretend that I did."

"That would be jolly hard on both of us," he said.

"You wouldn't know, dearest," said Maud, still troubled and still resisting.

"I should know," was his answer, and they looked at each other long and silently.

"There was a time," said Kames, in a low voice and very slowly for him, "when I would have had you, Maud, at any price, but I feel differently now. Now that I know what you can be to me nothing short of that would satisfy me and that's the truth."

That was the truth! Why argue further? And yet that was not *her* point; *her* point was—— But after all, Fitzherbert did not mean that it was more blessed not to love but that it was not wholly cursed if you could behave as if you loved.

"The worst of it is," said Maud, pulling away her hands very gently and rising from the couch, "that I can't help it now. When we were engaged I was too stupid to understand you. I only came to understand you when I discovered all you had done for Ursula, what you had been to her. She kept a diary—I read it—that dreadful night when I came to her—too late! She had just passed away," and Maud moved to the window quietly and spoke with

all the self-control she could command. "You ought to have been there, you who watched over her all those last weeks of her lonely life. I ought to have been with her—I ought to have known she was ill. I didn't know because she spared me, and she spared me because she knew I dreaded loneliness and poverty. All my proud talk to you was humbug and conceit, Lionel. I loved nobody and I wanted money. I wanted to run away from her, from duty. Suppose you had been killed that day you had the accident?" She turned away from the window and came back slowly to his couch. "I should have lost all that I have learned at last to love—Ursula and you—and there would have been nothing left for me but the saddest memory a human being can have: the memory of things priceless that were neglected till it was too late."

No word that he could have said would have been so great a punishment as the expression in his face of incredulity struggling with surprise, pain, and great pity.

"You loved Ursula!" he said in a low voice, tentative and yet insistent.

"Not properly." Maud spoke out bravely. If she forfeited all that now remained in the world that stood between her and disaster, then she must forfeit it. She must speak the truth.

"Lionel, you have a right to send me away —I've been a humbug——"

His eyes, those large, bold, brown eyes,

wandered round the room mechanically as the eyes may of a man suddenly awakened from slumber; then he rested them upon her face. She stood, looking down at him, tall and beautiful and tender; but bowed with humility, despising herself.

"Do you love me, Maud?" he asked. What he meant was what he could not have meant two years ago, what he would not have demanded for himself, what he would not have been prepared to promise, although he would most certainly have given it to a good woman. What he meant now was not the passion of love, which he knew Maud would give him, but something else, that something that except from Ursula he had never experienced in his life and which he realised was "necessary."

He asked the question of Maud with absolute simplicity and directness, knowing that she would know all that the words implied, just as she had known all that it had implied when he said, "You loved Ursula?" Maud hesitated a moment and then said:

"All that I am capable of is yours;" then after a moment's pause she said, "Lionel, you must despise me." She stood waiting, tortured with self-reproach and anxiety.

"It is not for me to despise you," he said a little hoarsely. "I'm no saint, Maud."

No, he was no saint, his past life witnessed to that; but neither was he the sinner who flaps his wings and crows a noisy self-approbation; no mean personal vanity stepped in

between himself and Truth, and urged him to call good evil, or evil good.

"Do you mean," said Maud, "that you can forgive me now that you know what I am?"

"Don't talk of my forgiveness! Don't I need forgiveness?" He held out his hands to her and drew her down to the couch again.

"Oh, Lionel," she said tremulously. "How is it that I have happiness that I don't deserve? It must be because God sends His merciful rain equally upon the just and upon the unjust."

"There is time," he said. "I hope there is time left for you and for me!"

She knew what he meant.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Kames did not walk nearly so lamely as Maud had imagined he would. He actually got up from his couch in the library, and with the aid of a stick and Fitzherbert's arm he crossed the hall almost briskly and went into the dining-room.

"I am perfectly certain that I could walk alone," he said to Lady Dorothy as they seated themselves at table, "only they won't let me."

"You are positively agile," said Lady Dorothy, who was giving him a covert glance to see whether he had indeed grown any stouter. He had not, as yet, and perhaps the catastrophe would be averted. She sincerely hoped so, for Kames just as he was seemed to her delighted eyes exactly what he ought to be. He was stouter than Fitzherbert, but then Fitzherbert erred a little on the side of being gaunt. He did not look the aristocrat that Fitzherbert was, but then, thought the good lady, there was an indescribable charm in Lionel's appearance that would have fascinated her had she been a young girl far more than any mere regularity of feature.

To Maud it seemed so strange to see Fitzherbert sitting opposite to Lionel and pronouncing the brief academic benediction on their meal.

It was like a dream conceived by the brain of Ursula and continued by herself.

To Lady Dorothy nothing seemed strange that morning. She could almost have believed that no tragic break in the engagement between Maud and Lionel had ever taken place. The break, indeed, had been quite unnecessary and merely a symptom of the "general unrest" affected by the present generation. It seemed as if it were only the other day that it had been arranged that they were to come to Orpenden to meet Lionel's friends at dinner, and here they were at Orpenden, the only difference being that they were lunching and with Fitzherbert instead of dining and with strangers and the Monckton collarette. Surely it was only yesterday that there had been that At Home at No. 2, Brown Street? Almost the last thing that Lionel had said, before that silly, silly, wretched fuss Maud had made in the writing-room, almost the last thing that Lionel had said was that he was going to drive all the crowd away for the sake of poor little Kiddie, who was so lonely upstairs all by his own little self! Lady Dorothy looked through her glasses tenderly at Kames's face. What a kind man he was to have sung that song about not understanding anything about something or other! Everybody had rushed away the moment it was over—and no wonder! It was really very naughty of Lionel, but very, very charming of him and so clever. If Kiddie had lived he would have become very devoted to him. Poor Kiddie, how keenly he would have enjoyed

Orpenden ! After the poor darling had got over his first excitement and had barked just a little at the people in the house and at the portraits up in the gallery (the little man was so intelligent, he knew that portraits were people)—after he had expressed his dear feelings he would have simply loved the house. Had Lionel heard of poor Kiddie's death ?

She put the question to him in a softened voice, curling the stiff bridge of her nose in a marvellous way, for its appearance under normal circumstances gave no indication that it possessed elasticity.

No, Kames had not heard of it, and he raised his eyebrows and looked at Lady Dorothy with decorous attention, avoiding Maud's glance. Fitzherbert began to talk of other things and held Maud's attention, so Lady Dorothy had Kames all to herself.

Actually Maud had not mentioned the death of Kiddie to him ! But then people in love, when they get together are apt to be just a little self-centred ; they must not be too much blamed. Lady Dorothy forgave them and her forgiveness was all the more easily granted because Lionel's complete ignorance of the great tragedy gave her the opportunity of telling the whole story with the length and solemnity that it required. Having finished her tale, she went on to remark that her new pet was not as sensitive as Kiddie nor as intelligent ; he was merely very lovable.

" Why didn't you bring the little animal with

you?" asked Kames in a voice that scarcely concealed his relief at the prospect of a peaceful substitute for the demon of No. 2, Brown Street.

"I would have brought him, I wanted to bring him," said Lady Dorothy, "but I thought we should be too many for you as you are not quite strong yet. You will see him later on. But I must warn you not to expect in him the individuality that was Kiddie's strong point. Dogs have individuality," she added firmly as she glanced round at Fitzherbert and nodded her head across at Maud.

"My dear lady," said Kames warmly, "I have no doubt that every blessed blue-bottle has got its own individuality, only we haven't time to observe it."

Fitzherbert listened, but said nothing.

"That's going too far, Lionel," exclaimed Lady Dorothy.

This was taking all the glory and credit from Kiddie's individuality.

"It's not going far enough. Nature isn't as exclusive as you think," said Kames. "For all you or I know," he went on, turning to her and speaking in that warm confidential manner that she loved—"for all you or I know, there are beetles walking on that terrace behind Fitzherbert that have souls to be saved. Remember that when you go and stamp upon 'em!"

"I don't stamp on things," said Lady Dorothy, who would have been scandalised had

the speaker been any one else than Lionel Kames.

"I do," said Kames; "I stamp on 'em and I don't care. If I was a Buddhist, 'pon my word, I shouldn't know where to walk."

Lady Dorothy had been under the impression that the transmigration of souls only concerned "four-footed" beasts that were familiar in the domestic circle, or such wild animals as are objects of popular interest in the Zoological Gardens. In that heavenly Cosmos which one day she would reluctantly accept as a substitute for the earthly one, she hoped that there would be no attempt made by Providence to introduce insect life. It had not answered here and she was convinced that there would be "no room," apart from other objections.

Of the four persons seated in that dining-room at Orpenden, none of whom was undistinguished in appearance, the most striking figure was that of Fitzherbert. Even when he was silent, his stern features and luminous pale grey eyes dominated the table. Lady Dorothy turned to him.

"You know how Major Kames chaffs," she said with an appealing glance through her eye-glasses, for here was an ecclesiastical official whose business it was to admit to the world beyond only those passengers who held first-class tickets. "You know how he chaffs," she repeated.

Fitzherbert laughed. "Yes, I know how he chaffs."

But what he exactly meant Lady Dorothy was not certain. She sighed. What was wrong with the world was that it was too modern. Delightful as Lionel was, he was, of course, modern. Fitzherbert was modern. In her young days, she could not remember any clergymen who were celibates and wore cassocks in the house. All this was modern and the old sound Evangelicalism that knew the truth and said it clearly was dying out and everything had become a jumble.

And what were Maud's thoughts? She remembered with amazement that when she was at Orpenden, sitting at this same table, eighteen months ago, she had looked at Lionel with lowered critical eyes and for the hundredth time pronounced him to be typical of the full-blown prosperous philistine—with artistic pretensions. Now, looking at him with the eyes of love, he seemed to her simply a dear, sensitive, pathetic figure and she was prepared, if it was necessary, to champion him against the world. In the old days her criticism of him had exhausted her nervously; now she felt a profound peace in his presence—such peace as Ursula had felt.

She did not ask herself what Fitzherbert thought of him. Having ceased to criticise Lionel herself, she did not anticipate the criticism of others. Lionel's acquaintance with Fitzherbert had occurred by accident, but had not their friendship been made possible because of some community of mind?

This thought must have been mirrored in her eyes, for Fitzherbert suddenly broke off his talk and said quietly, without altering the inflexion of his voice:

"You are asking a question?"

Maud flushed a little.

"A stupid question, I am afraid," she said; and then, as he did not remove his eyes from hers, she added:

"I was thinking: what do you and Lionel talk about?"

Kames had caught the words and adroitly disengaging himself from Lady Dorothy's grasp, he exclaimed:

"What do we talk about? Why—drains."

"Drains!" repeated Lady Dorothy.

Maud looked musingly at her future husband.

"Do you mean moral drains?"

Lady Dorothy looked helplessly round the table.

"Yes," said Fitzherbert, at last answering Maud's question. "We discuss that interminable question: whether and how far the State can destroy the weeds of social life and preserve the flowers? It is the old question that Plato discussed: Can Virtue be taught? Or, does Virtue come by inspiration? I use the word 'inspiration' in its philosophical sense: 'Ye know not whither it cometh?' I think the answer to both these questions is 'Yes.' Virtue can be taught and it also comes whither we know not. It may be that this dualism is only apparent. But think of what all this means if

we take it seriously, all it means in political effort and in religious aspiration. While we delay in making this effort, while we hesitate to seek the Spirit, the problem of Virtue remains insoluble."

Lady Dorothy coughed slightly. The problem of Virtue was not insoluble in No. 2, Brown Street. What a pity it was that Lionel should share views of this kind (whatever they were)! It would only encourage Maud in being eccentric.

Still, disquieting thoughts were not suitable for such a happy occasion. Whatever views Lionel Kames might have, she was thankful to have him back again in the family circle; and as to Fitzherbert, he seemed almost a holy man, though misguided in some respects.

Almost before lunch was finished the doctor arrived unexpectedly, and Lady Dorothy and Maud went into the drawing-room to wait until the interview was over.

Maud had scarcely taken up her cup of coffee when she recollected the buttons on Fitzherbert's cloak.

"I must sew them on properly," said Maud.

"One of the maids will do it," said Lady Dorothy.

"They won't do it as well or so quickly as I shall," said Maud, touching the bell.

"You can't do it here," said Lady Dorothy, "and it will only make a fuss."

"Let me do it here, dear Aunt Dorothy. I shall retire to the other end of the room," said Maud in a firm voice. "It must be done at

once, as you know Father Fitzherbert wants us to start as soon as the doctor has gone. He has an engagement."

Before her aunt could make further objections she had demanded the cloak from the amazed butler and sent an urgent demand to the servants' quarters for the requisite tools wherewith to do the work. She spoke with such quiet insistence that before five minutes had elapsed she was seated at the extreme end of the drawing-room, out of sight of Lady Dorothy, had got the cloak upon her knees and was rather feverishly attacking the buttons.

"You are making a fuss, my dear," said Lady Dorothy without turning her head.

"I am," said Maud, from the distant corner. "I really couldn't allow some callous hand to sew on these buttons. I wish I could sponge the front of the cloak with some Scrubb's ammonia but I suppose that would be going too far."

Besides, there was not time. In a few minutes they heard voices in the hall and the doctor drove away. A moment later and Fitzherbert came into the drawing-room.

"Well," he said coming straight up to Maud and looking down at her, "the news is good. Kames is doing remarkably well; the bone seems to be righting itself with the massage he is having. It is wonderful how happiness helps the work. Kames now has everything in his favour."

Maud had thrown the cloak behind her chair

and sat with the needle in her hand, looking up at Fitzherbert.

"I don't like hurrying you, but I am afraid I ought to be starting in ten minutes," he added.

The time had been all too brief at Orpenden, but what did it matter? Was it not the first of many visits, the first day of many days?

It was indeed only the first day of many days, and yet when the door of the library closed on Maud, and Kames was left alone on his couch, it seemed to him as if the hours that separated him from Maud's next visit were not hours but years. But the future was gilded with a strange brilliance such as he had not dreamt of, a beauty of which he was almost afraid. He had looked forward to his Parliamentary career merely with the sober desire to be reckoned among the workers of the world; he had hoped to fill the emptiness of his heart with the warmth that is beaten out of the struggle and stress of public work; but he had never expected to enter upon this new life with the exhilaration and buoyant hope that filled him now as with an intoxication.

Maud's love was more than ever he had hoped for in a woman. Should he get used to it? Should he cease to wonder and delight in it? Human nature accustoms itself to depths of sorrow and also to heights of happiness. This afternoon when she bid him good-bye she had kissed him passionately and told him in a tragic whisper to "take care of himself" till she returned. Should he get used to this warmth

of solicitude? He certainly would get used to it, but it would become a necessity of his life!

Kames sighed deeply as he lay on his couch. It was the sigh of fulness of happiness. Then he looked round him and reached for a book from the table at hand. Maud's love was absorbing, but it was also stimulating, he had the woman of his heart to work for—her approbation to gain!

He opened the book and began to read, but in the stillness of that spacious room only broken by the fitful crackling of the fire, a sudden deep regret broke in upon his thoughts, a piercing sadness. Ursula would never enter the house of his married happiness, she would never tread these floors, she would never sleep under the protecting roof of Orpenden, never see their children, never share in the vicissitudes of his public life, never discuss with him his new projects, or those old questions that Fitzherbert spoke of, questions that the world has always discussed since it began to think at all and always will discuss! She was gone, but not to any strange place; she was gone whither all the Past has drifted and to which the Present drifts inevitably, bearing with it its joys and sorrows, its victories and its defeats on the ceaseless tide of that interminable river that we call Destiny.

. . . . .

Maud was being swiftly carried along the roads towards London in the growing shadows of that eventful afternoon. Even Lady Dorothy

was silent. Too much had happened during the last few hours for any one of the three to think that it was necessary to entertain the others.

Lady Dorothy was thinking of many things: of future visits to Orpenden, of Maud's wedding —and, after the wedding, of the necessity of drawing Stella into closer connection with No. 2, Brown Street. Stella would have to initiate and help with all social functions. Lady Dorothy was plunged in serious reflection!

What was Fitzherbert thinking of? He sat silent, looking straight out before him over the heads of the two ladies opposite. He was quite unconscious that his cloak was tidy. He had not noticed, in buttoning it up, that the buttons were firm and in their right places; or, if some obscure cognition of the fact had dawned in his brain, that germ of thought had never risen into full consciousness.

Suddenly Maud turned in her seat and looked anxiously round at her Aunt Dorothy.

"I quite forgot to warn him of that crease in the carpet!" she said.

"What do you mean?" demanded Lady Dorothy, startled out of her thoughts.

Fitzherbert lowered his eyes to look at the girl.

"We couldn't go back, I suppose?" stammered Maud, glancing at the watch on her wrist. "I quite forgot to warn him! There was a crease in the carpet in his study. I noticed it and meant to speak of it, and then, somehow, I forgot!"

"Well, my dear, what does it matter? Very

careless of the servants, of course; but what else can you expect in a bachelor's house?"

"But it is so dangerous," said Maud, urgently. "He may fall over it. I suppose we couldn't go back and——"

"My dear Maud, why in the world should he fall over it?" said Lady Dorothy. "What an imagination you have!"

"Why shouldn't he fall over it?" exclaimed Maud. "Couldn't we go——?"

"No," said Fitzherbert very quietly and he leaned forward a little and looked straight into Maud's anxious eyes. "No! Your anxiety, Miss Monckton, is out of all proportion to the cause. Kames isn't to walk without the assistance of his man for another day or two."

Maud sank back into her seat, out-argued but unhappy. "I shall wire directly I get home," she said.

Then she saw the smile lurking behind the lips opposite to her and the pale grey eyes full of humour.

"You are laughing at me," she said. "You think I am a fool; perhaps I am."

Lady Dorothy looked away; she was conscious that the talk was now getting a little private.

"I don't want you to torture yourself unnecessarily," said Fitzherbert. "There are enough serious troubles without our inventing them. Not merely for your own sake, but for his," he added in a low voice. "Take a courageous view of life. Now! Always!"

Maud returned his gaze. "I had forgotten," she said quietly.

"And when you write to him this evening," he said, smiling broadly, "you can mention the crease in the carpet."

"You are right," she said. "You always are."

THE END

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